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"MY WEDDING-DAY WHICH YET DID NOT MAKE ME A WIFE," SAID MONICA, ABSENTLY.

**THE BARRINGTONS'
ESTRANGEMENT.**

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"It was summer time, the days were at their longest, and the June evenings were so warm and balmy that everyone loved to be out of doors, and it really seemed as though the whole population of Dering had deserted their homes to enjoy the fresh air: but the quiet little town was surrounded on all sides by country walks and rural scenes, besides the never-failing attraction of the sea-shore, so that the many "couples," delighting in a lovers' stroll, in no wise clashed or interfered with each other, and one pair who had walked along the sands, far beyond the limit of the esplanade, were practically as much alone as though they had been on a desert island.

They sat in the little opening made by a receding cliff, and gazed idly at the restless, ever-

changing sea, but their thoughts were far away from the scene before them. These two had come to a crisis in their lives; to-night must settle for them both a momentous question. Their whole future must be influenced by their present decision, and so, perhaps, it was not strange that though both their hearts were full, for a time neither spoke.

Boy and girl, young man and maiden, these two had grown up together in quiet, sleepy Dering. There had never been a time since he was old enough to think of marriage that Vernon Clifford had not looked on Alice May as his future wife. There had never been a time since she thought about the future she had not felt she belonged to him, and yet there was no formal engagement between them. They—as the phrase goes—understood each other, that was all.

Vernon was twenty-four, Alice nineteen. The man was handsome, high-spirited, daring, with many friends; the girl was a quiet, gentle creature, shy and retiring, rather silent in society, and at all times slow in expressing her opinion. Most people in Dering thought young Clifford was throwing himself away, and wondered what

he could possibly see in that "dull little Miss May."

Vernon was assistant to the local doctor, and earned two hundred a-year. Alice was the only child of the Dering curate, and till lately, had lived with her father in a pretty ivy-covered cottage beneath the shadow of the old grey church; but the Rev. Septimus May had finished his work now, and obeyed the call to rest. Alice was alone in the world and although warmly invited on a long visit to the Rectory, she could not, of course, intrude permanently on her friends' hospitality, and very soon her next step must be decided.

"Of course she will be married," the Rector's wife said to an intimate visitor, "young Clifford has been dangling after her for years, he must come to the point now."

"He's only two hundred a year, dear Mrs. Musgrave," said the lady addressed, gravely.

"Well, plenty of people have married on less." "Miss May is not in the least a suitable wife for Vernon Clifford," retorted Mrs. Fane. "She's a good little creature, but he has such splendid talents he is sure to make his way in the world,

and he'll want a wife who can hold her own in society."

And now the crisis had come. Vernon had called at the Rectory to take Alice for a walk; at Mrs. Musgrave's suggestion, she had told him she thought of leaving Dering to earn her own living, and she felt in her heart that if he let her go it was saying farewell to all their dreams of a future spent together, and their paths in life would diverge for ever.

At last he spoke.

"I can't understand why you want to go away. I am sure the Musgraves are pleased to have you. Why can't you let well alone, Alice?"

"They are very kind," she answered; "but I can't live on charity, Vernon, and that is what it would mean. I have been at the Rectory three months already."

"If only I were rich," and a flush came to his pale, handsome face, "you should never go away at all. We would marry and settle down."

A dead silence. Alice looked wistfully out to sea, and after a pause Clifford went on bitterly.

"But a poor beggar like me, can't dream of such luxury as a wife yet. Alice, you know I love you; I've loved you all my life. There's no need of protestations between you and me, we've understood always that we belonged to each other."

"I used to think so," she answered at last, and there was a ring of pain in her voice; "but latterly I've fancied you were tired."

"Not tired of you, dear. Tired of poverty and its bitter pangs. Tired of this miserable, sleepy town, but never tired of you, Alice—never that!" "I must go away," the girl continued, gravely. "The Musgraves aren't rich, and even if they were I could not live on their charity. I have heard of a situation at Bournemouth, and I think I shall take it."

"Don't!" he urged. "Stay here. My salary may be raised soon, and then we might risk a start together. I am sure to get on in time. When once I get my M.D. degree I shall try for a post in London, and there I shall make a name."

"I can't stay here, Vernon," she said, sadly; "I think living on charity would kill me; but if you wish it I will wait for you twenty years. I will be true to you always, only you must let me work, too, because I could not wait in idleness. I should break my heart."

He lifted his eyes and fixed them full on her face. Vernon Clifford had those dark violet-blue eyes which often charm a woman's heart away.

"Don't you care for me, Alice?"

"You know I do."

"But your pride is stronger than your love. Just suppose you take this situation at Bournemouth—as governess, I presume?"

"Governess and companion," she replied.

"Just so. Well, if you go there we should never meet at all. Your pride will prevent your coming here on a visit to the Musgraves. You would call that charity. And even if your employer, condescendingly, invited me, my pride wouldn't let me go to a house where you occupied a dependent position. Besides, when I am a famous physician, I shouldn't like to have it said that my wife was a governess before her marriage."

Alice winced.

"You are ashamed of me," she said, bitterly. "Well, then, we had better part."

"Your headstrong folly has made it necessary," he grumbled. "Surely, Alice, my wishes ought to have some weight with you, but you seem to set them at defiance."

The tears stood in her eyes. She had loved him so, and, until to-night, she never realised her idol was made of brass, not pure gold. It was a sharp awakening, a bitter shock to her.

But she never faltered in her resolution. She knew that if Vernon's salary were raised that night he would only be a few pounds richer. If matrimony was utterly impossible now, would twenty pounds of extra income make it practicable. Besides, if Vernon would be ashamed of her for doing honest work, would he not in time be ashamed of her for being poor?

"Alice," he said, in a low wooing tone, and no one's voice could be more persuasive than Mr.

Clifford's when he chose. "Alice, be reasonable, and stay here."

"I cannot. Vernon, if you really loved me, I don't believe you would wish it."

"Oh, if you doubt my love, there's nothing more to be said. I suppose this is good-bye!"

"Yes. Vernon, at least, let us part friends for the sake of *auld lang syne*."

"Oh, I bear no malice," he answered, lightly. "You are an obstinate young woman, but I suppose you must have your own way; and now we'd better be turning back or it will be nine o'clock before we get to the Rectory."

It was nine—past—but Mrs. Musgrave was alone in the drawing-room when Alice entered it. The Rector had been called out and supper delayed. Something in the girl's white, wan face touched the lady's kindly heart. She put one hand on her shoulder and asked gently,—

"Did you tell Mr. Clifford about Bournemouth?"

"Yes. I shall write to-morrow and accept the situation."

"And he approves?"

"No!" a vivid colour came rushing into Alice's cheeks, "but Vernon Clifford and I are only friends, Mrs. Musgrave. He has no right to interfere in my affairs."

The elder woman looked at her pityingly.

"If he felt only friendship for you, he had no right to behave as he has done."

"Perhaps he felt more," replied the girl, "but he gave me the alternative. If I take Mrs. Barrington's situation all must be over between us. When he is rich and famous, he says, he should not like people to know his wife had earned her own living."

"More shame for him!" said Mrs. Musgrave, indignant. "Of all the selfish men I ever met he is about the worst. Alice, don't cry, child; he isn't worth a single tear. I grant you Vernon Clifford is good-looking, but clever he is not; and I, for one, very much doubt the success he makes so sure of."

"I was never good enough for him," said Alice. "He has travelled so much, and seen so much society, and I have lived all my life at Ivy Cottage. I can quite understand his wife ought to be a brilliant fascinating woman, but, Mrs. Musgrave, I loved him so. It's just as though I had lost a part of my life."

Mrs. Musgrave looked at her searchingly.—

"Child, it's better for you that the parting should be sharp and final. I'll tell you now what I feared, that this half-and-half engagement would drag on and on until the best years of your life were wasted. I'm more thankful than I can tell you that at least you know the worst."

"I am glad I shall be away," confessed Alice, "for I don't think I could have borne to stay here and meet Vernon as a stranger. Oh, I hope Mrs. Barrington will have me. Do tell me all you know about her."

"It's very little, my dear; when I was at Bournemouth last winter I made her acquaintance. She is a very pretty, fragile-looking woman, with only one child; her parents are devoted to her, and do their best to comfort her, but she gave me the impression of having buried her heart in her husband's grave."

"And they are well off?"

"They are so rich that they need deny themselves nothing; Sir Francis Trevor is a baronet with an enormous estate in Yorkshire. Mrs. Barrington is his only child."

"And heiress I suppose."

"I'm not so sure of that; I rather fancy the property is entailed on heirs male; but in any case she and her little girl are amply provided for. I could not wish to find a pleasanter home for you, and though I would gladly keep you here for your father's sake, yet I know you will feel happier if you are independent."

Mrs. Barrington's letter came in a few days. She engaged Miss May as governess to her little girl and companion to herself, at a salary of eighty pounds a year, and Alice began her preparations.

"A nursery governess!" said one or two spiteful tongues. "Of course Mr. Clifford can never think of marrying her now!"

And Helen Foster, the eldest daughter of the Doctor who employed Vernon, went a step

further; she had always been jealous of the handsome assistant's devotion to "that Alice May." A bright, dashing-looking girl, she would not have objected to Clifford as an admirer herself, so she quietly managed to be *tête-à-tête* with him on the day Alice left the Rectory, and said with well-feigned surprise,—

"Really, Mr. Clifford, you ought not to be here. I am quite astonished at finding you in the surgery, you ought to be at Dering station seeing Miss May off for her situation."

Her black eyes met his keenly, and instead of snubbing her impertinence as it deserved, Vernon felt thankful he had broken off entirely with Alice, and so could deny the innuendo.

"As it happens, Miss Foster, there is no *ought* in the matter; Miss May and I are old friends, but I have no more call to attend to her journeys than the rest of her acquaintance."

"I thought you were going to marry her?"

"Then you thought wrong."

"But you were engaged to her?"

"Never! There was an old childish attachment between us, but we were never seriously engaged."

"Well, I used to wonder what you saw in her." After that Miss Foster smiled rather lavishly on the assistant, and her parents, who were tolerably clear-sighted, felt their wilful daughter was "encouraging Mr. Clifford."

"He's as clever a youngster as I've ever had in the surgery," the Doctor confessed to his wife, "but I don't like him; Vernon Clifford speaks very fair but he's no depth of character."

"He is very agreeable," said Mrs. Foster, "and sure to make his way in the world; we have nine children, and if the girls don't marry, what will become of them? I think Helen might do worse."

"You would let her marry him on two hundred a year!"

"Well, I married you on less," with a smile, "but if Vernon is so clever he might get an appointment at some hospital while he prepared for his M.D. degree. Helen is a difficult temper, Bob, and she is twenty-two. If she and Mr. Clifford fancy each other I should not refuse my consent."

"All right, Nell, your head is better than mine; but I thought he was engaged to little Miss May."

"It never was an engagement, and he couldn't marry her now. She's taken a situation as nursery maid, Mr. Clifford is too proud to put up with that."

"She was a nice girl," said the doctor gravely. "I shalln't forget her at her father's death-bed. Well, I suppose if Helen and Mr. Clifford fancy each other, he must have her."

Vernon was thrown a good deal into Helen's society during the rest of the summer. He had been used to spend most of his leisure hours with Alice May, so he now found time hanging heavy on his hands.

Helen was always willing to accept him as her escort on walk or visit. He discovered she was a very pleasant companion, far livelier and merrier than Alice; besides she was ambitious, and could enter thoroughly into his projects.

"I must take my degree," he told her, "and then go to London; a man only rusts in a place like this. In London I should soon make a name and fortune."

"London is the only place worth living in," Helen would agree. "And of course you would get on; you'd have to settle in some good neighbourhood, and just try for the right sort of patients. My father has spoilt his prospects by staying in a dead-and-alive hole like Dering. You must take warning by him."

All this was very pleasant. Perhaps Helen's conversation became all too agreeable to Vernon Clifford, or else his heart—poor, shallow thing!—was caught in the rebound, for within three months of Alice May's leaving Dering, he was engaged to Doctor Foster's daughter.

"You are both old enough to know your own minds," said the Doctor when his consent was asked; "but, Clifford, I must tell you one thing, I don't believe in long engagements; either you arrange to marry my girl in twelve months' time, or you remain just acquaintances. I won't have

Alice May's story over again ; for years you were hanging after her. I don't believe in shilly shallying."

"I ask nothing better than to marry Helen at once," said Vernon, hotly. "And, Doctor Foster, let me remind you, I was never engaged to Miss May."

"You can't marry on two hundred a year ; but there's a post advertised this week you might get with a little influence ; it's house surgeon to the Savory Hospital, and the salary is three hundred a year with residence."

"That's a good deal ! I thought house surgeons received much less."

"It's a large hospital, and being near some large collieries, there are a great many accidents. Savory's not a very pleasant place to live in, but you might take that till you'd got your degree."

"I mean to settle in London as soon as I am M.D. No country stagnation for me !"

"I hope you'll like London prices," said the doctor shortly.

But though he did not cordially like his assistant, having once given his consent to the engagement, he did his utmost to procure the post at Savory for Vernon, and he succeeded so well that, before the year was out, Mr. Clifford took his wife home to the quiet house in the hospital grounds allotted to the resident surgeon.

It was a very grand wedding for Dering ; six bridemaids and a sumptuous breakfast. Mrs. Musgrave was at the last, as her husband performed the marriage ceremony, she could hardly stay away ; but, through all the festive scene, she seemed to see Alice May's face rise up before her ; and when they got home she could hardly help abusing Vernon to the Rector in no mild terms.

"To forget Alice in five months, and marry a girl not fit to tie her shoe-string !"

"My dear," interposed her husband, "if you ask my opinion, this is the best possible thing for Alice May."

"How ?"

"She is far too honourable to go on caring for another woman's husband ; her nature is so clinging and sensitive, I verily believe she would have kept faithful to Vernon Clifford for years, had not he raised this barrier between them. For Alice, this wedding is just the best thing that could possibly happen ; but, unless I am greatly mistaken, there are two other people who will live to regret it."

"Who do you mean, dear ?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Clifford," returned the Rector drily.

CHAPTER II.

PERHAPS no one ever set out to seek their fortune with less confidence than Alice May. The girl had none of the push and self-complacency which marks modern young ladies. She had spent all her life in Dering, and loved the dear old-fashioned little town almost as though it had been a living creature. Alice had absolutely no ambition, she would have been content to marry Vernon Clifford, and do the best to make the most of his slender income. She would have toiled hard to make a shilling, do something more than a shilling's work, and been quite contented to have no interests beyond her own fireside, but it was not to be. Vernon had himself cut the links which bound them together, he had surrendered all the old tender ties, and Alice had as it were to make a fresh start in life, and find a new world.

It was a long journey from Norfolk to Bournemouth, and little Miss May felt fairly tired out when the train stopped at the West Station, where she had been directed to alight. All seemed bustle and confusion, one of the many excursions for which Bournemouth is famous in summer, was just returning to London, and in the crowd the girl felt almost dazed, and it was an intense relief when a voice said, courteously, —

"I think you must be Miss May, my aunt sent me to meet you."

Alice started, she saw before her a tall broad-shouldered man with dark hair and a strangely earnest face, a man as different from Vernon

Clifford as well could be, but who impressed the girl with the idea of quiet strength.

"If you will point out your luggage I will tell them to send it up," pursued Mr. Trevor, "and we can drive home at once, Mrs. Barrington is very anxious to see you."

"Is Mrs. Barrington your aunt," asked Alice, when she had pointed out her two modest trunks, and Mr. Trevor led the way to an open carriage drawn by a pair of spirited chestnut horses.

He smiled.

"She is my first cousin. I am Lady Trevor's nephew, and just now on a visit to St. Mirian's, I hope you will be comfortable there, Miss May."

There was something in his voice which made the girl fancy he thought she would not fulfil his hopes. Alice looked up anxiously, and for a moment their eyes met. Douglas Trevor glanced at her reassuringly, and she felt that his face was one to be trusted.

"You are very young to come so far from home," he said, kindly.

"I am nineteen, and," she blushed, "I have no home, my father died in the spring, and since then I have been looking for a situation. Mr. Musgrave was my father's rector, and he and his wife would keep me with them until I heard of something they liked for me."

"I have met them both," said Trevor, "and they struck me as being staunch and true. Did they tell you anything in particular about —"

he hesitated, "my cousin ?"

"Only that Mrs. Barrington was very beautiful

and very delicate. I gathered that she had never

got over her husband's loss."

"She never has, but Miss May, your face says I can trust you, and I would rather you knew the truth before you saw Monica, it will make things easier for you both. Mrs. Barrington is not a widow."

"Not a widow !" a bewildered look came into Alice May's brown eyes, "I do not understand."

"No one understands," replied Mr. Trevor, "it is a mystery which baffles us all. When Monica was eighteen she married Alan Barrington, one of the best fellows I ever met, a man on whose loyalty and honour I would have staked my soul, he was devoted to her, in fact it was that old fashioned thing, a love match on both sides. Barrington had no profession, and no settled home. He and Monica travelled continually the first three years after their wedding. Sometimes she came home on a visit looking as bright and happy, it did one good to see her ; sometimes Sir Francis and Lady Trevor would meet the Barringtons abroad and spend a few weeks with them at Paris or Dieppe, no one dreamed of there being the slightest difference between them until one summer night Monica and her little girl arrived at Trevor Court alone and unexpectedly. She brought no maid, no nurse for her child, and she absolutely refused to answer a single question respecting her husband."

"You mean they had quarrelled," said Alice, wondering, "but surely Mr. Barrington made some effort to see her."

"Poor fellow ! Yes. He came to the Court, but she would not see him. He has written letter after letter, but she refused to open them. My uncle and I met him in London, but he could only tell us he was entirely innocent of any wrong to Monica. He would not tell us the reason of the estrangement, because he said she had begged him never to reveal it, and so it remains a mystery. That Barrington loves my cousin as well as ever I am positive ; that Monica, in her heart returns his affection I feel certain, and yet this miserable separation has lasted two years and seems likely to last through their whole life."

"Where is Mr. Barrington ?"

"Abroad ; he said he could not stay in England, he was shooting big game in the Rockies, the last we heard of him. Monica would not remain at Trevor Court, she said it was torture to her when anyone asked after her husband. As she is really very delicate, and the Yorkshire winters tried her, we said she was ordered to live in a milder climate, and my uncle took St. Mirian's entirely for her sake. We do not "give out" that she is a widow, but most people assume it ; she refuses all society, and

seems like one fading away. The only persons she has in the least taken to are Mr. and Mrs. Musgrave. They happened to find little Barbara, who had lost her way in Branksome Chine, and see her safely home, and Monica has always been grateful to them since. We have begged her again and again to have a young lady as governess to Barbara and companion to herself, but she was always dead against the idea till Mrs. Musgrave recommended you. I fear you will find St. Mirian's but a dull house, Miss May, but if you can in any wise lighten the heavy shadow which rests over it, you will be doing a work of mercy."

"Is Mrs. Barrington an invalid ?"

"No ; she has a good many invalidish ways, but I do not think her seriously ill. When Sir Francis first took St. Mirian's he hoped to be there only a few months, but now nearly two years have passed, and there seems no chance of his being able to return home, unless indeed he would leave Monica alone there. Both he and my aunt grieve for the Court, they have their interests there ; they love the place dearly, friends, and neighbours duties and amusements fill up their whole life, and yet, at sixty, they are forced to turn their back on all they care for, and make their home in a strange watering-place."

All this time they had been driving along the road to Westbourne, but now they had turned into the Branksome Estate, and Alice could hardly restrain a cry of admiration as she caught sight of the fragrant pine woods and forest of rhododendrons, while here and there a quaint red-brick house rose up as though it had been pitched there all ready made by some ardent admirer of the scenery.

St. Mirian's was one of the oldest of these houses, and as they drove up to the door a strange nervousness seized on Alice May, she foresaw that Monica Barrington was a creature of moods ; what if she took a prejudice against her new companion ?

The butler held open the drawing-room door and announced Miss May. Douglas Trevor had paused to give some directions to the coachman, so Alice had, perchance, to enter alone. Two ladies sat in the pleasant room, one of middle age, comely and kindly looking ; the other such a vision of beauty that Alice May's beauty loving nature went out to her at once.

Monica Barrington was twenty-four, but looked younger, so fair and unlined was her delicate complexion, so slight and willowy the graceful figure. She wore a loose white Cashmere tunic, fastened at the waist by a silver girdle ; her hair, the exact colour of a bright new sovereign, was pushed back from her face and plaited in a coronet on her head ; her eyes were sapphire blue, their brows and lashes nearly black. Her features were regular and finely cut, but yet the face lacked something. In a moment the truth dawned on Alice May, it lacked hope ; beautiful though she was now Mrs. Barrington would have been ten times more lovely had there been one ray of hope or energy in her calm, statuary face. Despair, indifference, and a terrible calm were the only things revealed by her expression. It was as though she would not rouse herself to take any interest in life.

"Monica," said Lady Trevor, after she herself had bestowed a very kindly greeting on the little companion ; "would you not like to take Miss May to the nursery, and show Barbara to her ?"

"Barbara will be in bed," was the calm reply, "and I daresay Miss May is tired."

Lady Trevor made one more effort.

"We must try to make Miss May feel at home, dear. Remember she has come a long way to live with us."

This produced a faint fleeting smile on the beautiful apathetic face.

"I am quite sure you and my father will make her feel at home," and then Mrs. Barrington closed her eyes as though to indicate the conversation was over.

They went upstairs together, the rich, prosperous matron and the poor little homeless wanderer.

Alice May's heart was full of pity. She had known, of course in an abstract sense, that rich people had their troubles, but she had never had

it brought home to her before. She saw the tears standing in Lady Trevor's eyes as she led the way to two pretty rooms opening into each other, which she had had prepared for the little companion.

"My nephew promised he would try and persuade you, Miss May."

"Mr. Trevor told me—something; indeed I will do my best."

"What do you think of Monica?"

"I think she has had some terrible trouble, and that, at any cost, she ought to be roused from her present state of depression."

"Yes; but no one can do it. She sits for hours doing nothing, she never opens a book, she never touches a needle. It is just as though her soul had gone away, and left only her body here."

Then Alice May forgot the gulf between a hired companion and a great lady. She forgot her own trouble, and the heartache Vernon Clifford had given her in her deep sympathy for this mysterious trouble, she put one hand on Lady Trevor's shoulder and said gently,—

"Mrs. Barrington is so young, things *must* come right in time. As her child grows older she will have to take an interest in life for little Barbara's sake; and, meanwhile, we must do all we can to rouse her. Does she care for nothing—walking or driving, music or singing?"

"She has never touched the piano since—since her trouble, she never walks beyond the garden or the seashore. Sometimes I persuade her to go for a drive, but she never opens her lips, she sits at my side like a statue. Miss May," said Lady Trevor, as she turned to leave the room, "we dine at eight, but do not trouble to dress if you feel tired."

Which Alice interpreted to mean a kindly doubt as to the state of her wardrobe, but Mrs. Musgrave had taken care her little friend did not leave her house unprovided with evening attire; Alice's deep mourning rendered much variety impossible, but she possessed a soft black silk dress trimmed with crape, the square-cut bodice and elbow sleeves edged with a ruche of white net, and this she quickly put on. As she paused for a moment to look in the glass Alice decided Vernon Clifford had been wise to break off the old ties. If he won the fame and wealth he coveted, his wife would have to be a far more distinguished-looking person than her quiet little self.

And yet Lady Trevor thought she had never seen a sweeter face than Alice May's. The large velvety brown eyes, the rich deep auburn hair, and pale creamy skin seemed to her very taking; the gentle dignity, the sweet, shy face attracted her to Alice May as she had never hoped to be attracted toward a hired companion.

There were five at dinner, Sir Francis, a genial, hospitable old gentleman, welcomed Alice kindly, and strove to make her repast a success, but Monica was like a wet blanket, she never spoke unless pointedly addressed. She sent away dish after dish untouched, and her sad, silent presence seemed a blot upon the harmony of the little party. Perhaps it was a relief to all when Lady Trevor gave the signal for the ladies to retire.

"Well!"

It was Sir Francis who spoke, and his nephew who knew perfectly to whom the brief enquiry referred, answered quickly,

"I think she'll do."

"She's a lady, and I should say a sweet tempered girl into the bargain; but she's over young to have any influence with Monica. Douglas, I am getting to despair. Is this state of things to go on for ever; am I to see my child's heart breaking under my eye?"

"I know I shall seem unkind," said Douglas, slowly; "but I believe the best thing to do would be to let Barrington see Monica."

"She positively refuses."

"I know; but when he returns to England we might ask him here without her knowledge, and show him into the room where she was. He loves her, she was once devoted to him. Only let them meet and I believe things would yet come right."

"Leave you no idea of the cause of the estrangement? You and Barrington were fairly intimate,

Can you form no suspicion of Monica's cause of complaint?"

"None: I could stake my soul on Alan Barrington's honour, I don't believe it is in his nature to be harsh to any woman, much less to one whom he loves as I know he loves Monica. I believe the whole thing is some miserable mistake which one meeting would clear away."

Sir Francis shook his head.

"If Barrington were not in fault he would not submit calmly to his wife's desertion of him," objected the Baronet.

"Well, I don't consider he *has* submitted calmly; at least he tried his utmost to induce her to hear reason."

Sir Francis looked at his nephew sadly.

"Then you blame Monica?"

"I blame her for her silence. The meanest criminal upon this earth has a right to hear the charge brought against him and to disprove it if he can. Monica's conduct implies she has some great grievances; in common justice she ought to say what it is."

"Barrington knows what it is."

"And keeps silence for her sake, because, I suppose, poor fellow, he has not given up the hope she will come to her senses and hear reason."

"And you cannot guess what it is?"

"No—can you?"

"I've tried till I'm almost frantic," confessed Sir Francis; "sometimes I fancy she's discovered some secret in his past life, but then Barrington's past was like an open book. Then I begin to think there was a flaw somewhere in the marriage ceremony, but the wedding was at our own parish church, and short of Barrington's having a wife before he married Monica, I can't see what would invalidate it. We know for ourselves that he's as steady as time, and that he spared nothing to gratify any wish of hers. The only thing against him was his love of roving; nothing would induce him to buy a property and settle down."

"That's not a crime."

"His money was right enough and his lawyers—I saw them when the settlements were being drawn—most gentlemanly fellows. I suppose it would be of no use for me to call on Dynas and Carlyle, and ask if they could throw any light on the mystery?"

"It wouldn't be fair to Barrington," said Mr. Trevor, promptly. "No, sir; there are only two persons from whom you ought to seek the information—Monica or her husband."

"It is a bad business, Douglas. There's little Bab five years old, in a little while she'll be asking why she has no father like other children."

"Aye, and in less than two years Barrington can claim the charge of her. I wonder if Monica ever remembers that by the law of England a father can claim his children when they are seven years old."

CHAPTER III.

ALICE MAY found herself more at home at St. Mirian's than she could have thought possible. It was a relief to Sir Francis and Lady Trevor to have some one to whom they could confide their anxieties.

Little Barbara "took" to her new instructress from the first, and, in fact, the only member of the family who did not seem pleased with Alice was the one who had engaged her service—beautiful unhappy Monica.

"You must have patience," said Douglas Trevor, meeting Alice and her little charge in the beautiful gardens near the pier the day before he was to leave Bournemouth, "in time I think Monica will open her heart to you."

"She seems almost to dislike me," said poor Miss May, "when I try to talk to her she goes out of the room. I am no nearer to her than I was the first day I came."

Douglas sighed.

"She was spoilt from her childhood, and poor Alan Barrington loved her so well he only continued the spoiling. I don't suppose Monica ever knew what trouble meant until—"

"Until she left her husband," hazarded Alice.

"I was going to say until the fatal grievance which drove her from his side. Try and get her to confide in you, Miss May, and see if you can't soften her heart."

Alice shook her head.

"I am sure I shall never have any influence over Mrs. Barrington. She is so beautiful and accomplished. She has travelled half over the world, and I have spent all my life in one quiet town, where everyone thought me dull and common-place."

"People make mistakes sometimes," said Douglas, gravely. "You are not dull, and you will never be common-place. Take my advice, Miss May, and forget what your Dering friends thought of you. People who have known one all one's life aren't the best judges of what one can do. In spite of your despair I believe you will win Monica's confidence yet; and I go away more comfortable about my uncle and aunt for the feeling they have you to cheer them."

He had left her.

Alice lingered in the gardens till it was nearly Barbara's tea-time, and then they took the omnibus to County-gates, when it was only a short walk to St. Mirian's.

Mrs. Barrington was in the drawing-room when Alice entered it, and, contrary to all custom, alone.

Sir Francis had gone to the station with his nephew, Lady Trevor was lying down with a headache. The tea things stood unnoticed on the gipsey table. Alice busied herself with them, and presently carried a cup across to Monica.

"You will feel better if you drink it, you look so tired."

"Tired!" for once Mrs. Barrington broke through her reserve and spoke freely; "tired is no word for it, Miss May, I am weary to death—wary of my life and everything in it; and yet death will not come to set me free."

"Don't you think you are very wicked?" cried Alice, impulsively; then, as Monica stared at her in bewilderment she went on more gently "I mean you have everything—*save one*—to make you happy. Health, beauty, prosperity, the love of fond parents, and of a dear little child. Don't you think Mrs. Barrington it is wicked to give up all interest in life just because you have had *one* trouble."

"You know nothing whatever about it," said Monica, fretfully. "I have made up my mind never to care about anything again. I want nothing in the world but death."

Alice looked at her gravely.

"If you died it would break Lady Trevor's heart."

"I don't think so. It can't be any pleasure to her to see me the wreck of what I was."

"Mrs. Barrington," said Alice, firmly, "if no one else will speak plainly to you I must. If you go on leading this aimless unoccupied life, if you go on brooding over your secret trouble, there can be but one end to it."

"Death!"

"No—madness!"

Monica Barrington started up with flashing eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried, eagerly. "How dare you suggest such a thing! Do you think I is ever out of my mind—the dreary asylum, the prison grounds, the dismal, desolate rooms, and her face! Oh, Miss May, it is cruel to torture me!"

Alice put one hand on her shoulder.

"I never tortured anyone in my life. I know nothing of asylums. I never saw one. I only warn you, and, indeed, it is the truth. I you do not rouse yourself from this terrible morbid state your health and reason must suffer."

"Did anyone tell you my story? Did you know anything about me before you came here?"

"I believed you a widow until I came here. Mr. Trevor told me—"

Monica interrupted her.

"Douglas told you all he knew, of course, don't mean that. Did anyone tell you *why* I left my husband? Is that the reason you talk to me of madness and asylums?"

"As I understand it no one knows the reason you left Mr. Barrington, and I never mentioned

the word asylum till you did yourself. Surely you do not mean your husband is insane?"

"Insane! Alan Barrington has the clearest intellect, the soundest brain I ever met. Insane! There would be some excuse for him if he were!"

"Mrs. Barrington," pleaded the companion, "won't you trust me with your secret? I would keep it as faithfully as though I were your sister. You may refuse to tell the truth to your father and mother, lest they should repeat your confidence to Mr. Barrington, but I never saw him, and the chances are I shall never speak to him in my life. I will pledge you my sacred word never to reveal anything you tell me, and surely it would be better for you to speak of your troubles than to brood over them in secret."

Monica raised her beautiful eyes to the girl's face.

"Have you a lover?" she asked suddenly.

"No—not now."

"That means you had one and he died."

"No; I will tell you the truth, Mrs. Barrington, and then you will understand I know what trouble means. We had grown up together as neighbours—we were playfellows, friends, boy and girl lovers. He never said to me in so many words, 'will you marry me,' but ever since I could understand such things, I had looked upon him as my future husband. My father died; I had no money; Vernon was too poor to marry me, and I decided to earn my own living. He told me then if I persisted in it we must part. He was sure to get on. When he was a celebrated doctor he should be ashamed of anyone knowing his wife had worked for her bread."

Monica's eyes flashed with scorn.

"You were well rid of him," she said, quickly. "He must have been a miserable coward."

"He was not brave. That is the story of my romance, Mrs. Barrington. You see I have had my troubles—will you trust me with yours?"

"Yes, but not here. We might be interrupted at any moment. To-morrow I will go for a walk with you among the pines, and then I will tell you all. You may turn from me in scorn. I feel sometimes I scorn myself, but, Miss May, I was sinned against not sinning. I was the cause of a cruel wrong; but I had no more knowledge of the wrong than my little child."

Sir Francis came in before dinner, and looked pleased at seeing the pink flush on Monica's face, anything to rouse or interest her was his motto, and he began to tell them he had asked Douglas to settle at Trevor Court, so that the old homestead might no longer be neglected.

"There was a time when I sorrowed bitterly I had no son, but Douglas is very dear to me, and I know he will make a good master when I am gone."

"You mustn't talk of dying," said Monica, earnestly. "I couldn't spare you, papa. As for Douglas, I am thankful from the bottom of my heart that he is your heir. If anything in the world could add to my misery it would be that my little child could succeed you."

"Poor little maid," said Sir Francis, feelingly. "She's the bonniest child I ever saw. I can't think why you are not prouder of her."

"I love her dearly," replied Monica, "though I have often wished she had died before—before the trouble came."

Everyone was amazed the next day when Monica expressed her intention of going for a walk among the pines and taking Miss May as her companion.

"She hasn't seen Branksome Chine at all yet, and I can point out the best view to her, and show her the place where Bab was lost and Mrs. Musgrave found her," announced Mrs. Barrington. "You will enjoy a morning on the pier with father, mamma, and we shall be all right."

It was the first time Alice had ever seen Monica in walking dress. At home she affected loose, clinging draperies, and these she wore even in the garden; but for the expedition to the Chine, she had put on a tailor-made costume of thin, blue serge, and a shady sailor hat. What a child she looked in spite of her twenty-four years and the shadow in her life.

Branksome Chine was lovely. It was too late for the rhododendrons to be in bloom and too

early for the heather; but the wealth of foliage was delightful to the eye. The brilliant coloured toadstools, the rippling stream, and in the distance the wide blue sea made up a picture Alice May never forgot.

"See," said Monica, pointing to a grassy bank in one of the most secluded glades. "No one can disturb us here. You may turn from me in horror when you have heard my story; but for the child's sake I will trust you. I believe you are right, and the secret is eating into my brain. There are moments when I cannot think or reason, when I feel almost dazed. I will tell you everything, and you will see then I have cause to feel my life is blighted."

But she was so long in beginning Alice felt almost frightened. At last she began in a faint, far-off sort of voice.

"What do you think of my cousin, Douglas?"

It was the last question Alice had expected, she hardly knew how to answer it.

"I think you might trust him," she said, slowly. "Mr. Trevor seems to me loyal and true."

"He is both. Long ago it was the wish of my father's heart that I should marry Douglas. Papa could not bear the thought of my leaving the Court. I was very fond of Douglas. He petted me like a spoilt child. We were neither of us iota in love, but we liked each other, and we were thrown constantly together, so perhaps, if I hadn't met Alan it might have been."

"You married at eighteen I have heard?"

"Yes, after six weeks' engagement. It was a case of love at first sight. We met at a ball. Alan was staying with some neighbours of ours for the shooting, they had met him on their travels, and thought him charming. They knew nothing of his family. When he asked my father for me, he told him he was quite alone in the world. His parents had left a handsome property between himself and his brother, the latter died soon after, and Alan inherited the whole. When I first knew him he was a very wealthy man, and his greatest pleasure seemed to be continual travels. He was never long in one place, and he particularly disliked spending much time in England."

She paused, and Alice having ventured on the question,—

"Do you mean Mr. Barrington's story of himself was false, and that he had relations possibly undesirable ones?"

"He had neither brother nor sister, father nor mother. There, that is his picture," and she pulled a locket from her dress and opened it. "I ought not to wear it, but I can't help it. I loved him so, I have tried to hate him, tried to put him out of my heart, but I never can."

It was the picture of a man of perhaps a little above thirty, a pleasant kindly face, with dark hair and thoughtful eyes, not the face of a man who would deceive any woman, least of all his wife.

"I would trust anyone with such a face," said Alice, impulsively. "Dear Mrs. Barrington, can't you be mistaken in your doubts of your husband?"

"Mistaken! Listen, after my marriage I lived in a fool's paradise. I was so happy the weeks and months seemed to glide by with almost lightning speed, but one thing I noticed even then, twice a year Alan used to leave me. He would be away two nights, and he always returned sad and pre-occupied. In reply to my questions he always replied he went on business, and—I trusted him so—I believed him."

Alice ventured to press the little hand so near her own in token of her deep sympathy. Mrs. Barrington went on,—

"It was two years ago last May; the date seems burnt into my mind. We were in London for some weeks, and when the time of my husband's usual half-yearly absence came round, I said to him, I supposed he would not need to stay away two nights as business was transacted in the day time, and our hotel being near Charing-cross, he could start as soon as he pleased. Rather to my surprise he told me he could not possibly manage without being away the two nights. I suppose my curiosity was aroused, and I asked about his business. He would tell me nothing, and we parted in anger—I have never seen him since."

"But that can't be the only reason of your leaving him!"

"No! the day my husband left me I received a letter from a friend of mine; he had taken a furnished house in Hertfordshire, and she begged me to come and see her. Piqued at Alan's absence I decided to accept her invitation, and I started for Darley that very afternoon."

"Helen Nairn was delighted to see me. Her house was the loveliest spot I ever saw for a country village; but she seemed dissatisfied with it, said she was glad they had only taken it for six weeks, which were nearly up. Pleased for her objections to The Grove, she told me it was close to a large private lunatic asylum, in fact, the grounds joined, and from some of her windows she could see the patients taking exercise with their keepers. I had never seen an asylum. Where Helen felt dread and aversion I had only curiosity; in a moment of mad folly I persuaded her to take me to the part of the grounds nearest to Dr. Tring's. Miss May, I saw my own husband walking in the garden with a woman on his arm, as young and beautiful as myself. I nearly fainted. When I recovered they were out of sight, and Helen was watching me with frightened anxious face."

"I never dreamed Mr. Barrington had a friend there," she said, gently, "or I would not have brought you here for the world."

She was a good woman. I thought so then, I think so now, though our opinions differed greatly on my course. She wanted me to go home and ask Alan for an explanation on his return. I told her of his regular absences twice a year, of his refusal to explain them except by the curt plea of business, but I could not break her resolution. To her mind, before I did anything else I was bound to speak to Alan. I refused, I said I should go to Dr. Tring's as soon as my husband had left the place. When she found it was hopeless to change my purpose, she agreed to accompany me. She had a slight acquaintance with the Trings, and she thought she could manage to evade their guessing our real motives for the visit.

She went to the point at once, and told the doctor I had fancied I recognized a relation among the patients. He made no attempt at denial, the lady I had seen was Mrs. Barrington. She had been under his care for nearly five years, her friends came twice a year to see her.

"She will never be any better," concluded Dr. Tring, "it is a case of hereditary dementia. Nothing seems to do her any good or give her any pleasure but the visits of the gentlewoman who was here yesterday. He is devoted to her, and has more influence over her than any other creature. I ask no questions. He placed her here as 'Mrs. Barrington,' she wears a wedding-ring, and always speaks of him as her husband, so there can be no doubt of the tie between them. I believe he kept her under his own roof as long as it was possible to do so without danger."

"Miss May," and Monica's voice had a ring of agony, "do you understand that poor mad woman is Alan Barrington's lawful wife. Because my beauty took his fancy he wronged both her and me. She was only placed in the asylum a month before my wedding-day—my wedding-day which yet did not make me a wife."

"Now do you understand why I keep my secret? It would break my father's heart, it would kill my dear mother to know the shipwreck I have made of my life, and that poor little Barbara is 'nobody's child.' I refused to see her—her father. I wrote to him before I returned to Trevor Court, I told him I knew the secret of his interest in Doctor Tring's asylum, and that I would never willingly see his face again. If he had ever loved me, if he had the smallest remorse for the wrong he had done me, I begged of him to help me to keep the wretched secret from my parents; thus far he has granted my prayer."

Alice May felt spell-bound, the story was so utterly unlike what she had expected.

"What did Mrs. Nairn say?"

"She begged me to see Alan, if only once, and listen to his explanation, as though any explana-

tion could undo the wrong. She is in America now, and I have nothing to fear from anyone in England."

"Why don't you tell Mr. Trevor?"

"Because Douglas would be furious, and wreak a terrible vengeance on Alan, and I—in spite of all—I love him still!"

"Are you satisfied, Miss May?" Monica asked at last. "Will you confess now I have cause to shun society—to care for nothing more in life?"

"I think you ought to care for a great deal," said Alice, simply. "After all, you know, Mr. Barrington sinned for love of you; you can't tell how hard he struggled before he yielded to the temptation. In giving up all hope in longing for death it seems to me you are trying to make him a murderer."

"It's easy to talk," retorted Monica.

"So many people lose all," said Alice gently; "love, home, friends; you have everything left but love. Don't you think, for little Barbara's sake, you might try to bear your burden instead of sinking under it? No one will ever suspect the truth; you can hide the misfortune in your own heart, but if you filled your life with interests, if you tried to be cheerful, I think, in time, you would be happier."

"Without Alan? And that is not all; think of that poor girl in the asylum and the wrong done her!"

"She does not know; she never can know, and it was not your fault."

"You are wonderfully frank, Miss May," said Monica. "You think I am a coward and you don't mind saying so."

"I think you have suffered terribly, and I want you to try and bear your burden bravely—for Barbara's sake."

"Poor little Barbara!"

But the voice in which she said it had lost its bitterness; and, as they wandered homewards through Branksome Chine, Alice May began to hope that Monica's nobler self would awake yet and struggle against the burden of despair under which it had succumbed.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. FOSTER had told Vernon Clifford Savory was "not a very pleasant place to live in." He might have gone further, and said it was a most disagreeable one: situated in a large northern town close to a colliery district, the Savory Hospital was in a low, poverty-stricken neighbourhood, there were no resident gentry near enough for young Mrs. Clifford to be on intimate terms with them. The wives of the consulting physicians called on her, so did the chaplain's mother, but there it seemed likely her society would begin and end.

To a girl who had been the belle of Dering, who loved gaiety and amusement, the little house in the hospital grounds seemed dullness personified, and before the Cliffords had been married three months, Helen was egging on at her husband to resign his post and go to London.

Vernon's feelings were on her side, but he had just sufficient prudence to see that to make a change before he had taken his degree would be disastrous to his prospects; besides, he had hoped to save money before he settled in London. Helen by turns coaxed and upbraided. She gave way to "low spirits," and, in her fretful discontent, estranged the few people who might have shown them any kindness.

Perhaps the home troubles weighed on Vernon, and prevented his giving that attention to his studies they required, anyway, when nearly a year after his marriage he went in for the final examination which would have made him "Doctor" Clifford, he failed to pass it—failed, as a few kind friends pointed out to him, not through any want of ability, but by sheer carelessness.

There was a miserable scene at home. Helen openly accused him of not doing his best, and wanting to keep her another year in that detestable Savory. Perhaps he was too disheartened to attend properly to his duties, anyway, he made a mistake of no small gravity in his treatment of a case; there was a meeting of the governors of the

hospital, and Vernon Clifford was requested to resign.

Doctor Foster came North to confer with his son-in-law; more in sorrow than anger he pointed out to Vernon that his career would be blighted beyond redemption if he did not mend his ways.

"Will you come back to me?" he asked kindly.

"I am seeking another assistant; it will be less painful to you to work under me than under a stranger, and Helen will have her mother and sisters to help her with the youngsters!"

For Mrs. Vernon Clifford had presented her husband with twin babies within a week of his enforced resignation.

"Helen would be miserable at Dering," said Vernon, frankly. "We both should. We left it full of hope meaning to return when I had made a name and fortune. How can we go back to it as failures?"

Dr. Foster lost patience.

"Well," he said, sharply, "I have made you what I consider a generous offer only to have it scorned. Perhaps you will tell me your own plans. I believe you have no private means. You can't have saved much. How do you propose to keep your family?"

"Heaven knows, I don't," said Vernon, in such a tone of utter despair that his father-in-law's heart was touched, and he said in a very different manner,—

"I only want to know your views that I may try to help you—if I can."

"I suppose I must take another assistant's place. I can think of nothing else. At least, we have no debts. The furniture goes with the house, so we have no expense of removing it."

"But you'll want furniture wherever you go," said the doctor, "and with your high notions, Vernon, it's not everyone you'd suit as an assistant."

"I think we should do better in a livelier place," said Clifford; "both Helen and I get on with our equals. Here we have been at a terrible disadvantage in mixing only with our inferiors."

The doctor drew in his lips.

"There are a good many people here I should consider my *superiors*. I suppose you mean you want to go to a fashionable place."

"Poor people don't like me," confessed Vernon. "You know at Dering I never got on with the grating patients."

"Well, I'll do my best for you if it's only for Helen's sake; but mark my words, Vernon, you must try and keep the next post you undertake. A rolling stone gathers no moss."

But there are some people in the world to whom fate is exceptionally kind. Vernon Clifford had lost one chance entirely by his own fault, another was found for him almost before he had realised his folly. A party of speculators had built and furnished a kind of private sanatorium at Bournemouth, considering every other house in the place is an hotel or boarding establishment, they must have had great faith in their venture, to spend so much money on it. The Dene was a most luxurious home, capable of accommodating some twenty guests. A first-rate staff of servants, under an able housekeeper, attended to domestic concerns, but the proprietors wished for a medical man and his wife, the one as resident doctor, the other as lady hostess. Tact, accomplishments, and pleasant manners were indispensable. They offered in return free quarters at the Dene, fifty pounds a year, and ample leisure for private patients. It seemed to Vernon Clifford when he heard of it, the post must have been made on purpose for him. His wife was delighted at the idea—the sole drawback was the existence of the twin babies. However, after an interview between the Cliffords and the chairman of the committee, it was decided to waive this objection, and in the spring Vernon and his wife took possession of their new home.

"It's not what I should have liked," Mrs. Foster told her husband. "To get on they'll have to curry favour with a dozen rich people, and there's no class so hard to please as fanciful, nervous invalids; but after the failure they made of things in the North, they ought to be thankful for another chance."

The doctor sighed.

"I hope they'll get on! but I don't feel

easy about them, wife. Helen is too much of a fine lady to make a good wife for a poor man. She's my own child, but yet I think Clifford would have done better for himself if he had married little Miss May. She was a quiet, domesticated creature. I wonder what has become of her?"

"We are never likely to know now the Musgrave have left Dering. Well, I do hope Helen will be careful and not offend people. All the same I'd rather have been mistress of a house of my own, even if it only had four rooms than live as we were on sufferance in a splendid mansion; and what's fifty pounds a-year to pay a nursemaid and keep them in clothes and pocket-money!"

It was little enough as Vernon speedily found out. At first all was plain sailing. Mrs. Clifford, delighted in beautiful Bournemouth, which seemed like an earthly Paradise to her after the narrow, dirty streets of Savory; but after a while she began to find magnificent shops uninteresting if one has nothing to spend in them. The ladies who came to the Dene were dressed in the extreme of fashion. Helen's tressseau was beginning to look a little out of date. Her dresses could not compete with those of the visitors. It was easy to run in debt. Credit was offered liberally to the apparent mistress of such a mansion as the Dene. After the first reluctance of keeping a secret from Vernon Mrs. Clifford felt no qualms. Her toilets began to equal those of her companions in elegance. She was the life and soul of the house, from carpet dances to amateur theatricals, no one could arrange things as well as the lady-resident. People who stayed at the Dene declared Mrs. Clifford was most charming.

Vernon did not find things quite so delightful as his wife. There came times when he wearied of living as it were in public, when he longed for a quiet evening alone with Helen; but, however tired he was of society, the daily round had to be gone through, he and his wife must appear at every meal, and start every amusement. A few private patients came to him, but their fees barely paid his necessary expenses. He too found that living in a mansion costs something, and by the time they had been at Bournemouth six months, he looked his position in the face, and knew that fifty pounds a-year did not cover his expenses, no nor half cover them.

He had not gone up for the examination again. He had no time for study. He knew in his heart he was drifting back instead of making progress. A few hysterical patients, one or two cases of gout, and as many of consumption, that was all the experience he was likely to gain at the Dene. It dawned on him slowly that, for the sake of being luxuriously fed and lodged, he had sold himself into a kind of social slavery.

It was October. The winter season had begun, every room at the Dene was full. People engaged them weeks in advance. The undertaking was certainly prospering beyond all expectations, and yet there was a careworn anxious look on the face of the resident doctor, and when Helen came into his private den one afternoon she was astonished at his troubled expression.

"What's wrong, Vernon?" she asked, gently. "You look as if you had bad news."

"Everything's wrong, I think, Helen," he answered, wearily. "Sit down a minute, I want to speak to you. We never seem to get a chance to talk over our own concerns."

"I'm going to drive with Lady Waterton at three, but I can give you a quarter of an hour," and she stirred the fire into a brighter blaze as she sat down. Truth to say one or two appeals for payment were in her pocket. If she did not get a liberal cheque from her husband her position might become a very uncomfortable one.

"We can't go on like this, Helen," said Clifford, slowly. "The game's not worth the candle."

"I am sure Bournemouth is a delightful place, and the Dene is a wonderful success."

"Wonderful!" he agreed, "but, my dear child, we can't afford it. Fifty pounds a year—forty when we have paid the nursemaid—won't pay our expenses."

"I wanted to ask you for some money," she began, nervously. "I know you had your salary last week."

"It's only a drop in the ocean, but I will do what I can for you, Helen. I daresay I can let you have five pounds."

"Five pounds! Oh, Vernon! I must have twenty at least. Think of the appearance I have to keep up and the expense of the children."

"They don't cost much, poor mites!" he said, bitterly. "I doubt if they ever have a new frock except those your mother sends them. A boatman's children at Dering looked more cared for than my little girls."

"Well, really, Vernon, that is unreasonable! I work hard enough, goodness knows, to keep things going here. You can't expect me to be head nurse as well."

"I am not complaining, Helen. I repeat we are in a false position. Thrown constantly with people far richer than ourselves we are plunged into expenses we can't meet. If you have to dress above your station, I have to play billiards, give tips, and generally comport myself as a moneyed man. We can't go on like this. My expenses this last six months are over fifty pounds. My salary, as you know, is twenty-five."

"Won't the committee raise it?"

"I asked the same question. They pointed out that by boarding the nurse and children they already gave me far more than what they had paid any former resident medical officer. There is nothing for it but to retrench or go."

"We can't go if you are in debt."

"You asked me for twenty pounds," he said, slowly; "don't tell me you are in debt, too."

"But I am," she said, frankly. "How can it be otherwise? I had two pounds when I came here, and you told me you could give me no money till Michaelmas. I had to have clothes, boots, and all that sort of thing. In my position I could not go looking like a dowdy."

"Never mind excuses. Can you tell me how much you owe in the town?"

"Not off hand. I haven't been extravagant, Vernon, and there's nothing pressing, except Madame Celeste and Bartley, the shoe shop; twenty pounds would cover those."

Vernon pushed a paper and pencil towards her, and said, hoarsely,—

"Put down what you owe as nearly as you can recollect. Don't deceive me, Helen. If your creditors sent their Michaelmas bills in as punctually as mine did you can't forget much."

But the total astonished Helen Clifford. In no time her list had reached sixty pounds. Sixty pounds in six months, and all of it as she knew for comforts rather than necessities. No wonder her hand trembled as she passed the paper to her husband.

"Do you know what will be the end of this, Helen," he asked, sternly?—"the workhouse! No human power can avert it if you go on like this."

"I am sure you need not talk; you say yourself you owe fifty."

He groaned, and a servant, tapping at the door to say that Lady Waterton was waiting for Mrs. Clifford, Helen went off, much relieved at such an excuse to make her escape.

Vernon sat on where she had left him, his face buried in his arm. He knew that ruin confronted him. How to avert it he could not tell. His private patients might be worth twenty pounds. In short, but for that revelation of Helen's, he might just have pulled through. Only just though; and now, with his wife owing more than a year's income, he literally knew not which way to turn.

Another tap at the door. This time it was a message; a little girl near the Dene had met with an accident, would Mr. Clifford come directly?

He put on his hat at once. The man-servant in livery explained the case as he led the way. The little one had missed her footing and fallen from the top of a flight of stairs to the bottom.

"We have lived here four years, sir," explained the servant, "and Dr. Massey always attended the family, but he died last August and since that we've not needed anyone. My lady sent me for the nearest doctor. I wasn't clear if you attended anyone but the visitors at the Dene, but I thought I'd see."

"I am always willing to attend private patients," said Vernon hastily. "Does your mistress live far?"

"No, sir," and the man held open a gate. "This leads into our grounds. St. Mirian's is close to the Dene. Sir Francis is in London, sir; but Lady Trevor is at home, and it's her little grandchild who had the accident."

A stately housekeeper met Vernon in the hall, and took him to the room where the child lay. A lady with silvery hair sat on one side of the bed, a beautiful girl at the other, while chafing the child's ice-cold hands was a face Vernon had never quite forgotten—Alice May!

He had never expected to meet her again; certainly never to see her at home in a house like this. The housekeeper referred to her, the old lady and her daughter both seemed to lean on her for support; and, through it all, she was calm and collected, patient and hopeful, answering Vernon's medical questions clearly and betraying not the slightest consciousness that this hastily-summoned doctor was her sometime lover.

"Will she die?" asked Monica Barrington, eagerly. "Oh! sir, tell me can you save her?"

"I hope so," answered Vernon gravely, "it is concussion of the brain; but she is naturally a healthy child, and I see no reason why she should not recover."

He applied some remedies, gave a few medical directions to the housekeeper, and promised to look again later. Lady Trevor followed him from the room.

"Barbara is my daughter's only child," she said to him interestingly, "and I think her mother's life is bound up with hers. Oh, Mr. Clifford, save her for us if you can!"

"I will do my utmost," he answered, gently; "but, indeed, I do not consider her in danger. I think that with care and good nursing she will pull through. Would you like me to go to the Institution and send you in a nurse?"

"My daughter's maid is a trained nurse, thank you, and Miss May is devoted to Barbara; besides her mother will be eager to nurse her herself. I do not think we need have a stranger."

"Mrs. Barrington does not look very strong herself," observed Mr. Clifford.

"She is very delicate, but it would only do her harm to keep her away from Barbara. Then I shall expect you later."

As he walked back to the Dene Vernon's thoughts were busy with the past. Was it really little more than two years since he had parted from Alice May? Why, it seemed a lifetime; and could that graceful woman possibly be the girl Dering had called "dull" and "commonplace?" the girl from whom he had parted because she was unworthy the position he meant to win. Well, fortune's wheel had changed their fate, he was a broken-down failure. Alice, the esteemed friend and equal of Lady Trevor; she might be called the child's governess, but it was easy to see the whole household regarded her as one of the family.

Vernon thought of pretty little Barbara in her dainty, cheerful nursery, with mother, grandmother and governess, besides well-trained servants to minister to her in her illness, and then he thought of his own children, one of whom had suffered severely from some infantile complaint only the week before.

The twins were not welcome inmates at the Dene, they were, in fact, regarded by servants, visitors and committee as intruders. A room in the basement had been allotted them as a nursery, and but for the devotion of their nurse—a Dering girl—they would have come off very badly, for none of the Dene servants thought their duty to attend on them, their mother had no time to pay them more than flying visits, and though Kate Johnson did her best, she was young and inexperienced, besides being something of a muddler, the twins had a neglected air in the matter of frocks and pinwafers, and their faces had by no means the immaculate cleanliness which is the rule in well-ordered nurseries.

At twelve months' old they were pasty-faced, rickety children. They had no perambulator, and so hardly ever went out, for Kate Johnson

was not equal to carrying more than one at a time; she was not encouraged to exhibit them to visitors in the drawing-room, and a great many people utterly ignored the fact that their "delightful Mrs. Clifford" had two children; what was to become of the twins when they "felt their feet," and could no longer be kept shut up in their basement nursery, their father had no idea.

He was conscious everything was wrong, but man-like, he had not an idea how to put it right. He felt in his heart the wisest thing would be to leave Bournemouth and take some post where Helen would have leisure for the children; but then it would be giving up a certainty for an uncertainty, and after her present gay, pleasure-seeking life, how would his wife care to be shut up in a small, cheap house with the children for her chief amusement, and, perhaps, one rough servant as the domestic help?

No, all was wrong, but how to put things straight was a problem beyond the power of Vernon Clifford.

CHAPTER V.

THE conversation in Branksome Chine had born fruit. Monica Barrington seemed to rouse herself from the terrible apathy that had fallen on her. After once confiding her secret to Alice May it was as though the lethargy of despair, fast creeping over mind and intellect, had been dispelled, and she had gathered her strength for the conflict.

"You have done her good," said Douglas Trevor when he came down to St. Mirian's for Christmas, "she looks more like her old self, Miss May, I won't ask you a single question that could seek to make you betray her confidence; but think of poor Barrington away at the other end of the world, an exile from home and friends, and if it is in your power to soften her heart towards him do your best."

Alice shook her head.

(Continued on page 212.)

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE small country estate which Lord Settefeld had rented for the shooting season this particular autumn was a very unpretentious little place; in fact, as far as the house was concerned, it was hardly more than a fair-sized cottage with exceptionally good stabling being surrounded on all sides by gardens in which flowers and vegetables flourished luxuriantly.

The shooting, however, was excellent, and it spread over a distance of some miles, joining the woods and coverts belonging to Crowhurst; it therefore seemed very near indeed to Sir Francis Stapleton's house and belongings.

It was this last fact that had induced Lord Settefeld to rent The Wolds, though no one except himself and Miriam (who had smiled significantly when she heard what he had done), had any idea of this.

Least and last of all did such a thought occur to Lady Patricia when in a state of eager delight she parted with her mother in Homburg, and journeyed back with her maid to enjoy what she called her one holiday in the year, two whole happy months alone with her brother in his small shooting establishment.

No pleasure that was offered to Patricia De Burgh was half so sweet as the prospects of this holiday alone with her dear Danvera.

This autumn especially the girl looked forward to her sojourn in her brother's shooting box more eagerly than usual.

She had had a very hard season in town, her mother was a very tyrant in her love for society and all that society entailed, and Patricia had grown almost exhausted with the amount of hard work demanded of her by her mother and the fashionable world to which she belonged.

Lady Settefeld was secretly very irate and disappointed with her daughter. Patricia, though barely twenty, had been "out" two years now and still she was unmarried, and what was worse, evinced no desire to become the wife of any man she met.

The fault of this lay entirely with herself.

She was not beautiful, she was not even pretty, nevertheless she possessed a great charm for all who were permitted to call themselves her friends, and there was more than one man who would have earnestly desired to make her his wife had he received the smallest encouragement for his hope to become certainty.

Patricia however had no desire to marry. Beside her brilliantly handsome mother, who still reigned as a queen of beauty, despite the existence of grown-up children, Patricia felt herself to be pale, insignificant, almost plain.

The thought did not trouble her, however, she was the least vain creature in the world, although this lack of vanity must not be set down to lack of pride or dignity.

Patricia was every whit as full of pride as her mother, only the spirit within them ran in such widely different grooves.

There was, in fact, very little in common between the girl and her beautiful, worldly mother. Patricia loved this mother tenderly, and through her affection shut her eyes to the large faults in Lady Settefeld's character; the real devotion of her heart, however, was given to her brother Danvers.

The bond of sympathy that had always existed between the brother and sister from their earliest childhood was too deep for outward expression; they never sought to fathom their love, they only knew it existed.

To Settefeld his sister had hitherto been the sweetest, purest, dearest creature on earth. While Patricia just adored her brother.

He was very handsome. He inherited far more of his mother's beauty than the girl did, though in both his sister and himself the swarthy skin of his father's ancestors was traced in their dark-toned complexion.

In a man, of course, this did not matter, but Lady Settefeld never ceased to sigh over Patricia's clear olive-tinted skin.

"The Mounteagle women have always been as white as snow!" she would say sometimes in impatient vexation when she was discussing her daughter, "it is really most annoying that Patricia should have inherited the Settefeld skin instead of resembling my family."

Lady Patricia inherited more than their dark skin from her father's ancestors. Her profound intellectual train of thought, her clear practical brain, her strong will and honest upright nature, these came to her as to her brother handed down from generation of brave, loyal, honourable men.

Patricia was fond of remembering the deeds and stories connected with her father's race; in heart of hearts the girl had little love or admiration for the Mounteagle family, ducal though it was.

Judging from the historical records which her mother had proudly put into her hands to peruse so soon as she was able to spell out words of three syllables, they seemed to her to have been treacherous time-serving, selfish, grasping, and tyrannical.

Patricia detested all that was not honest straightforward and truthful. Long ago when she had been a tiny baby girl, this trait had been clearly developed in her, and had caused her brother much admiration coupled with considerable secret amusement when he had seen with what dismay his mother perceived the workings of her youngest child's character. Patricia never could tell a lie.

She did not pose to be better than anybody else, in fact, she was not even conscious that her conduct was one whit better or different to the mass of other people, it was simply impossible for her to act the hypocrite, to play with prevarications, even in a social sense, or to deviate in the smallest way from the paths of truth.

Her mother's sister, Lady Agnes Blanqueville, had many a moment of amusement over this unconventional young niece of hers. It was so strange

to realise that Constance Lady Settefeld could be the mother of such a daughter.

"Patricia is distinctly not a Mounteagle," Lady Agnes said more than once when she was sitting in confidence with her sister, and Patricia's mother always sighed and shrugged her shoulders in despair.

"Have I not always said so?" she would exclaim. "What woman of our race ever had a skin like Patricia's?"

But Lady Agnes Blanqueville was not thinking of Patricia's skin when she uttered these exclamations. It was the whiteness, the purity, the beauty of the girl's mind and soul that always came upon her with fresh and more convincing force whenever she met Patricia.

"She is a beautiful young creature," she once said to her sister quite involuntarily, and Lady Settefeld had stared in amazement at the speaker.

"My dear Agnes," she had cried in answer, "it is very good of you to try and console me; but alas! Patricia is not in the very least degree a beautiful girl. I only wish she were!"

"I was thinking of her mind not her body," Lady Agnes Blanqueville had said, and she had sighed a little as she spoke.

Patricia's mother was most impatient.

"What benefit does a girl derive from her mind in our world?" she had asked, and after that unanswered question the conversation had ceased.

The beauty which had drawn forth a tribute of admiration from his Aunt Agnes, was not only recognised but revered by the young Earl.

"Patricia is not as other girls, heaven be thanked," he said now and then to his mother, "you cannot drive her in the same road with all the rest, mother. Leave her alone, she will marry one of these days when she meets a man she cannot only love, but respect. She is very young, there is plenty of time yet."

Lady Settefeld was inclined to be angry with her son.

"If you persist in encouraging Patricia to be eccentric and unlike other girls, she will shortly become altogether unmanageable, Danvers!" was what she had cried to this speech, "I think I shall have to put a stop to her being with you in the autumn, she always comes back more difficult and peculiar after she has spent a month with you!"

Lord Settefeld had smiled at this, but he was not alarmed at his mother's threat; he knew that Lady Settefeld enjoyed her little holiday freed from the cares and duties which her daughter's presence meant for her too well to carry out this intention of robbing Patricia of her one big delight, and sure enough as September merged into autumn there came letters from Homburg arranging for Patricia's early arrival at The Wolds, Westshire.

The girl had been at the little country house a whole week before her brother came down to join her. Patricia waited watching for his coming with a heart that thrilled with joy and gladness.

She had seen so little of her darling brother this season.

When Settefeld had found that neither his mother nor sister were inclined to bestow any liking or friendship upon Miriam Stapleton and that it might be as well to withdraw himself from the dangerous fascination of her fair young beauty, he had remained a very short time in town much to Patricia's disappointment.

The girl had pondered much over her brother's admiration for Miriam. At first she had troubled about it, too, for she had feared he might have grown to care for this lovely, soulless creature whose beauty had not blinded her for one instant to the real truth and worth of the heart and nature enshrined in so fair a body; but this thought had not lingered long.

Whatever Settefeld's feelings may have been when touching the girl he admired so much, they were well hidden, and his manner was so cool and indifferent that both his mother and Patricia speedily arrived at the conclusion that the interest he had taken in Miriam Stapleton had not been of any depth or any importance.

Both women were well pleased that this should

be so. Lady Settefeld from her autocratic and self-opinionated pride, and Patricia from her deep devotion and clinging tenderness for her brother.

With that unerring instinct which was founded on just thought and analysis the girl had at once fathomed the truth that Miriam Stapleton's real self was very different to what she showed herself to be, and in consequence Patricia disliked and distrusted this girl with lovely eyes and red-gold hair.

How right her first judgment was in this respect it was reserved for future days to reveal to Patricia.

She had, however, completely forgotten Miriam's very existence by the time she had arrived at The Wolds.

It was a little disappointing certainly, that Danvers was not there to meet her but the time went by quickly and the day preceding the one on which this story opened Lord Settefeld had arrived at his little shooting estate and had been welcomed by his sister with an enthusiasm and outward expression of joy, that spoke eloquently of the way in which the girl's heart had hungered to see him once again.

It was in moments of excitement such as this that Patricia De Burgh could almost justify the title of being called beautiful. Her usually pale grave face was illuminated with vivid colouring, her dark eyes grew luminous and splendid, her lips smiled, her whole being was changed.

She had so much to tell Danvers, so many points of interest to show and discuss in the little house and grounds, that Patricia failed to notice the difference that had come over her brother since last they had been together.

She clung to his arm like a child.

"Oh! I am so happy, so very happy, darling," she cried at every turn, and Danvers woke out of his passionate thoughts to smile at her faintly.

For him there would be no happiness now till he had seen Miriam once again, till he had urged his love a second time—till he had received her final answer.

Vague dreams and hopes mingled in his mind as he listened to his sister's voice, he conjured up a vision of life with Miriam as his wife, and Patricia as their joint sister, their most beloved friend.

There must be sympathy between Miriam and Patricia," he said to himself. "The very pride which was causing him so much suspense now, would be the link that would draw them together finally," so he argued with himself with all a man's crudity in the realisation of his hopes, and his ignorance of the subtle workings of a woman's mind.

The Earl had been up and off to make one of the shooting party the day following his arrival before Patricia was out of bed. She spent a long day waiting for his return, and dined alone, feeling strangely desolate when he did not return in time to join her.

He came very late, and for the first time since their reunion Patricia noticed there was something different about him—something she could not quite understand.

She said nothing, however. She was so wise in her innocence, she felt that this trouble, whatever it was, would be better left untouched by her, unshared by any. He told her he had been persuaded to remain and dine at Crowhurst.

"You cannot refuse Sir Francis' hospitality," he said, with a faint smile, "he simply will not take a refusal, he is such a good old soul. I am sure you will like him, Pat dear, and Lady Stapleton too, she is the kindest woman I have ever met—it is such a merry happy household, Lady Stapleton is full of inquiry about you, she has an idea you are delicate, Pat, because I said I thought it would be better for you not to join the picnic party to Black Rock ruins, to-morrow."

Lady Patricia was standing beside him smoothing his dark hair gently.

"Are you going, darling?" she asked.

He nodded his head.

"Yes, I shall ride over and join the rest of them at the ruins. Would you have cared to go, Pat dear? It is a tremendous distance, but still if you care to go—"

She shook her head and answered, "No—you know I am not quite the right sort of individual

for picnics," she added, with a smile, "and then I love being here, it is so quiet, so delicious. Perhaps we shall have a long day together to-morrow, Danvers," she finished wistfully.

Somehow she was conscious of a creeping sense of disappointment covering up the eagerness, the delight of her holiday.

The Earl drew her hand down and pressed it fondly.

"Of course we will, little sister—and not one day only, but many and many a one, and now say 'good-night' to me and trot off to bed, for you are looking pale and tired, Patricia."

The girl smiled and obeyed him, but when she wended her way into her pretty low-roofed bedroom, the smile died from her lips, and her features grew wistful and a little troubled. It was this change in her brother that troubled her; she felt he was hiding something from her. She did not know whether this secret was allied to joy or sorrow, she only prayed that it might never be the latter. She was so proud of him, she loved him so much; every little thing that touched him had power to move her, and as she sat a moment or two looking out over the moonlit lawn, Patricia seemed to be assured all at once that this present influence that was at work within him was no little thing, but was part of a great, an overwhelming power—a power which could, and probably would change the whole current of his existence.

Patricia had a long, quiet morning by herself; she had watched Lord Settefeld mount and ride away shortly after breakfast, and had stood waving her pocket-handkerchief till he was out of sight.

She was not a girl who required to be constantly amused; nevertheless, for almost the first time in her existence, she felt conscious of feeling restless, lonely, and frightened at the thought of spending a long day by herself in the country.

Towards the middle of the afternoon she had a horse saddled, put on her habit, and started for a long ride.

The exercise did her good, and the country was very pretty. She found herself however, by-and-by, in some perplexity as to where she was exactly, and while she came to a pause in a wide hedge-bordered lane, and sat pondering which road she ought to take, a small pony-carriage drawn by a stout grey cob, and conveying a pleasant-faced lady and a pretty fair child, came rapidly towards her. In an instant Lady Stapleton—for it was she—had stopped her carriage, she saw that the girl required some help.

"Do you want to know your way?" she asked. Then a little more quickly, "I feel sure I have the pleasure of speaking to Lady Patricia De Burgh, have I not? My name is Stapleton."

In another five minutes Lady Patricia was cantering down the lane beside the pony carriage. She had, as Lord Settefeld had prophesied, quickly lost her heart to this sweet-faced, gentle, motherly woman.

"You must come and have a cup of tea with me, Lady Patricia, we are just home now, and then one of the grooms shall ride back with you to The Wolds. It is some distance from here, and I cannot let you go by yourself."

Patricia smilingly accepted the invitation, and in another quarter of an hour she was off her horse and sitting in the quaint, cosy hall at Crowhurst, being greeted cordially by Dolly, whose headache had left her a little pale and languid.

It was a pleasant moment, and Patricia enjoyed it thoroughly. She was quick to respond to true kindness, and there was a ring of absolute sincerity besides, to her an adorable quality of motherliness, in Lady Stapleton's kindly interest and gentle kindness.

The girl sat back in a comfortable chair, and made great friends with Lilian and the dogs.

Strange as it may seem, nothing arose in her mind to link the name of this charming woman, of this quiet, straightforward girl, or indeed any connection of this family with the other girl of the same name, about whose beauty Patricia had heard so much during the past months, particularly from her brother's lips.

The clue to the change in Lord Settefeld had

not come to her yet. She even forgot her wistfulness and trouble in this pleasant little moment.

By and by, just as she was rising to start on her ride home, some one came striding in through the entrance, a tall, well-built young man, who seemed to be full of hurry and eagerness, and who was greeted by Lady Stapleton with an exclamation of surprise and even of some dismay.

"Thorold, my dear, is it really you? Why, I thought you miles away. There is nothing wrong, I hope?"

Thorold hastened to reassure his hostess, while he bowed to Lady Patricia and made a few quiet inquiries after Dolly's headache.

"Oh, no! Everything is more than well. The picnic is great success. I am returning to meet them on the homeward way. I only came back because—"Thorold was conscious that his colour deepened a little here—"because Miss Miriam was in great trouble about a bangle. She feared she had either lost it out there, or had left it behind her on the breakfast-table. We searched everywhere, and not finding it, I volunteered to come and see if it is to be found here."

Lady Stapleton's sweet face clouded.

"You have taken a very long ride for a very little thing, Thorold," she remarked. But Patricia, with that marvellous gift of sympathy and intuition, knew that a good deal lay behind these simple words.

As Lady Stapleton turned to her, and continued speaking, however, the girl suddenly became conscious of a vivid comprehension of intense surprise at her own dullness, and then of doubt and regret.

"I fancy, Lady Patricia," Lady Stapleton said, "you will have met my daughter, Miriam, in London?"

Miriam Stapleton! In an instant all was clear to Patricia. Her brother's restlessness and his silence, his changed self was translated to her as plainly as though put into words. She grew cold and still from the mingled pain and annoyance that this discovery brought her.

She hastened to make her adieus to Lady Stapleton. She wanted to be alone now, so that she might think over the new situation that was immediately sketched before.

She allowed Mr. Musgrave to put her up into the saddle, and sent a smile to Lady Stapleton, but the girl's heart was heavy as she rode.

Once, in a strange, almost incomprehensible sort of way, the memory of Thorold Musgrave's handsome, honest face rose clear before her, and she was conscious of a sensation of liking for the vision.

"He looks altogether too good a man to be made the plaything of a vain girl's coquetry," she said to herself, for now she understood perfectly the meaning that had lain hidden behind Lady Stapleton's little speech, and the look that had crossed her face when she had heard Thorold's explanation of his most unexpected appearance. But after that one moment's thought Patricia reverted to the more important subject of her brother and her brother's possible infatuation for a girl whom the sister's heart knew only too well was not worthy an instant of the love and devotion Danvers, Lord Settefeld, was capable of giving her.

There was nothing of any sort or description at this moment to bring the remembrance of Thorold more vividly or persistently in her thoughts. Nothing even to hint of the link that was to bind this strange man into the future not only of her brother but of herself.

CHAPTER V.

THOROLD MUSGROVE's quest was a fruitless one, there was no sign of Miriam's bangle to be found anywhere at Crowhurst, either in the dining-room or any other part. This fact was not strange when the jewelled ornament in question was reposing in Miriam's pocket, slipped there by her little, white hand when the idea came into her head to cease tormenting Lord Settefeld, at all events for awhile, and to get rid of her handsome companion, with whom she

had spent the whole of the day up to that moment.

Had she not been so very sure of her quarry, even Miriam, finished coquette as she was, would not have ventured to have given the Earl such a *mauvais quart d'heure* as that which he suffered at this picnic; but, knowing as she did now, the full extent of her power over the man, and being so well assured that her kingdom was her's the instant she chose to accept it, the girl was not loath to give herself the dual satisfaction of feeding her vanity, by realising how swiftly she could and did fascinate Thorold Musgrave, and by punishing Lord Settefeld for having dared to treat her as he had done in the beginning of the year.

Thus perfectly contented with the working of her plans, Miriam spent a most enjoyable day, finding a novel amusement in Thorold's awe of admiration of herself, and in diving below the surface of this earnest, clever, unworldly young man, and playing for a brief space with his strong, true, honest heart.

As for Thorold he seemed to live for the first time in his existence—it was not a dreamy ecstasy that fell upon him, it was a thrilling nervous excitement, a revelation of feelings such as he had not even imagined himself capable of experiencing before—he seemed to be carried swiftly along a fair broad road with the golden glory of a marvellous sunshine dazzling his eyes and penetrating to his very soul—thoughts of his work, of the calm, hard, toiling existence that awaited him in London had no place in this new mental condition which took possession of him slowly but surely each added moment he spent in Miriam Stapleton's bewildering beautiful presence.

He was like a man intoxicated with some powerful stimulant, yet the intoxication was not such as to deprive him of his senses, only to exhilarate them, to lift them out of the groove in which they had lain all these many, many years, to send a burning rush of hopes, desires, visions of delight, pouring through his whole being, till he could have held out his arms to the whole world, and have laughed and sang aloud from the joyousness that all so unexpectedly had come into his simple, earnest, hard-working life.

Miriam was enchanted with him for a little while. He was something new, and, consequently, he was most agreeable. She was accustomed to see men succumb to the power of her loveliness to the witchery of her sweet voice and brilliant conversation, but no man as yet had rendered her the absolute homage which was offered up by Thorold, so unconsciously, so simply.

He was very handsome and he was very earnest, she knew, too, he was clever. His very simplicity would have told her that if she had not overheard her father discussing Thorold with Lord Settefeld. Miriam abhorred common-place people, it was part of her *métier* never to trouble herself to be civil to any except the clever and the interesting.

"I leave the fools to you, dear," she was wont to say to her aunt in her coolest and prettiest tone of impertinence, and Miss Alicia Stapleton never failed to accept whatever position was given her by her lovely young niece.

To her aunt, as to her father, Miriam was something more than an ordinary being; she was a creature born to be adored and obeyed.

Thorold drifted instantly into the same thought. It seemed to him as if he had suddenly come in contact with some brilliant being from another world. He had an *awed* sense upon him as he drove her through fresh morning air and every now and then turned to look at her exquisite face with its smiling red lips and fathomless eyes.

They did not talk very much during that drive. Miriam was content to rest back luxuriantly on the cushions while this handsome young man beside her grew deeper and deeper entangled in the mesh of her fascination.

There was as has been said before a distinct element of novelty in winning the heart of this big simple creature and Miriam adored novelty.

The effect of her near presence was such as to drive all clear thought from Thorold's mind. He ceased to wonder about her, to marvel at the

character Laxon had given her of being the greatest romp of the family or to ponder on her strange utterance of hate against Lord Settefeld.

It was enough for him to realise that she had quickly accepted him as her friend, that she had chosen his companionship in preference to any other, that she seemed to find a pleasure in being with him; and that she was the most beautiful, the sweetest of the most marvellous living creature he had ever met!

How the day sped Thorold could hardly have told. Miriam kept him by her side all the time, together they explored the ruins, finding out the prettiest corners the easiest nooks. At luncheon he waited upon her—her very slave—and Miriam from the comfortable place he had chosen for her, let her eyes go with intense delight to where Lord Settefeld sat moody and silent, his dark face expressive of the jealousy that was consuming his heart at this moment.

It was the first time Thorold had not devoted impartial attention to the other girls. In every former expedition he had been the life and soul of the party, content to go hither and thither and to do everything for everybody.

Now Miriam kept him close to her side. He had no eyes, no thought, no remembrance for anyone but her.

The three other girls felt hurt, not from vanity, but from affection.

"He was our friend before he knew Mimi," Barbara said in an injured tone. Barbara was very free spoken. "I call it very mean of her to take him away like this."

"Mimi is different to us, remember, Babs," said Carrie Stapleton, the eldest girl of the family.

"And, of course, Thorold can't leave her if she wants him to stay," Mabel added.

But Barbara was really hurt.

"It all seems strange and nasty," she declared. "With Dolly at home ill, and Thorold so different, I begin to wish Mimi had never come!"

"Oh! Babs!" exclaimed both her sisters in a horrified tone of voice.

But Barbara had whisked away, and had walked past where Miriam sat with Thorold stretched at her feet, listening eagerly to her voice, and had darted a look of indignation at her lovely sister.

"Mimi is very beautiful, but she is not very kind," the girl said to herself. She was very young, only sixteen, and Miriam's nature was a problem set far beyond her reach. "I don't care if it is wrong, but I am sorry she came, very, very sorry."

Barbara's innocent wrath, however, could never have had the power to change her sister's amusement, if even Miriam had known of its existence. The afternoon was dawdled away by those two beneath the big trees in the most delicious fashion, but after awhile Miriam grew a little tired of her game.

"It is time to think of Settefeld," she said to herself, "and besides I don't want this one to become a nuisance. I did not imagine he would be so easy to win. I must keep him in hand, for he is the sort of man to be useful, I am sure—but for the moment I must get rid of him."

And forthwith she slipped the diamond bangle off her wrist into the pocket of her velvet coat, and in a little while there was a hue and cry, and every member of the picnic was employed in searching the ground for yards, in order to discover if possible, the treasure Miriam had lost.

The search being unsuccessful, of course Miriam tried to reassure everybody.

"I am almost sure I must have left it on the breakfast table," she said over and over again. "Please don't bother any more. I really feel certain my bangle is safe at home."

"If you feel so certain, why did you make such a fuss, Mimi?" inquired Barbara in her bluntest fashion, rising from her knees after a prolonged grope in the long grass.

"I know it was very silly. I am so sorry, so very sorry," Miriam answered, softly, and it seemed to Thorold that her lovely eyes filled with tears at her younger sister's rebuke. He

was conscious of feeling really angry with Barbara, and as he caught Miriam's eyes fixed on him in a sort of pleading fashion, he instantly made the proposal that Miriam had fully intended him to do, and before another quarter of an hour had gone, he had mounted one of the horses and had ridden swiftly away.

"I will ride back and meet you all on your homeward way," he said, as he had taken one farewell glance at Miriam's loveliness as a sort of talisman to protect him and comfort him until he saw her again.

Immediately he was out of sight, Miriam brought Settefeld to her side.

"Why have you neglected me all day?" she asked him, with a tone of deep reproach in her voice.

Settefeld did not throw himself on the grass as Thorold had done. He stood leaning against the tree at the foot of which she sat huddled up in her own supremely graceful fashion.

"Why is it that a woman so sweet as you should still know how to be so cruel, Miriam?" he said, his voice low, troubled, unsteady.

Miriam looked up at him.

"You say I am cruel—and to you!" she murmured, in simple amazement.

"To me; most assuredly," the Earl replied, quietly. "And to that other also."

Miriam laughed.

"Don't be so philanthropic!" she said, with the faintest of faint sneers. "Think of yourself only. Mr. Musgrove, I am sure, will acquit me of all cruel intentions towards himself."

"To-day, perhaps; but what of to-morrow?"

"Oh!" Miriam cried, gaily, "we do not live for to-morrow; we live in and for to-day." Then, with a complete change of tone, she said, "You are very much concerned about Mr. Musgrove and his future, are you not?"

"I like the man," the Earl said, quietly. "He is one of the honest, hard, struggling, earnest men who are the backbone of England's strength. He is too good to be fooled by anyone—even by you!"

Miriam's delicate face flushed.

"Merci bien, Milord!" she said, mockingly, though in truth his words—especially coming from him—made her furious. "You are more than ordinarily complimentary to-day. I regret I invited you to come and speak to me."

"There is no necessity for coquetry or other play between we two, Miriam," Settefeld said, gravely; yet the passion that throbbed his heart made itself felt in his voice, grave though it was. "When two people are about to be knit together by the closest bond that exists in the world, it is the time to dispense with all the arts and tricks which must form so large a part of our daily intercourse with strangers."

Miriam bent her head, her lips were smiling.

"You speak with great confidence about this most problematical bond, Lord Settefeld," she said, after a little pause. "You may remember there is such proverb of a slip being possible between the cup and the lip."

Settefeld bent down to her.

"Don't prevaricate or play with me any longer, Miriam. I told you I should not accept your answer as final. I hold to my word—once again I put myself and my future life in your keeping, pause before you send me from you—remember, if this is play to you it can be something like death to me. I am not a man to approach you lightly on such a subject. I come to you with my heart in my hands. I ask you once again, will you be my wife, mistress of my home, companion of my life?"

Miriam sat perfectly still. The smile on her lips, the triumph in her eyes deepened.

Impassioned beyond measure at her silence the Earl beat down towards her.

"I know well what urges you to pause, to draw back," he said, eagerly; "but oh! my love, let me urge you to forget the past, to put every memory of it away from you to—"

Miriam's smile suddenly faded; there was a swift, startled look in her eyes, she had turned very pale, strangely pale as he spoke these words, but as he broke off she recovered herself and gave an imperceptible shrug to her shoulders.

"I told Mr. Musgrove last night that I hated you, Lord Settefeld," she said with a gaiety that had something of hardness in it. "I—I am not sure—not quite sure you know that I did not tell him the truth!"

"Miriam!" the one word broke from the man's over-charged heart as in a cry.

She looked up at him.

"Still on reflection—I think I only said it as a good beginning to a flirtation with him. He looked such a stolid young man, he wanted something very vigorous to rouse, consequently I took him into my confidence, and I told him that I hated you, oh! most dreadfully, most intensely, that I hated you with all my might and main. Are you very cross with me?"

She rose from her crouching position as she spoke, and stood now leaning against the tree also. She was very close to him, and the fascination of her loveliness seemed to steal over him as some powerful, exquisite fragrance.

She had tossed off her hat, and her hair that would shine as gold in the sunlight, and seem a warm auburn in the shade, was ruffled about her white brows. She looked beautiful enough in this moment to tempt a saint, and Settefeld was no saint, only a very human man, who worshipped this fair slender girl as the one, the only treasure in the world for him.

He had turned pale at her jesting, she saw it, she was not moved by pity, but by wisdom. She put out her hand and touched his.

"I will only consent to become your wife on one condition, Settefeld," she said and though there was haughty touch in her carriage, there was a softness in her voice, "on one condition," she repeated.

He caught her hand and imprisoned it against his heart.

"My darling—my love!" he murmured. The whole aspect of his dark, grave face changed instantly.

Her words conveyed only one meaning to him that she was won! That she was his! What were a hundred conditions to him, he defied them all!

Miriam permitted him to hold her hand a moment; she watched his passion with a smile, but after that moment she drew her hand away.

"On one condition," she repeated, "on one condition only will I consent to become your wife, Lord Settefeld!" It was a lie. She needed no conditions to urge her to do that for which she had schemed, and planned, and almost prayed only that she did not ever trouble to pray. But she was merciless, she knew her power, she meant to push it to the utmost.

"What are conditions to me?" he answered breathlessly. "Enough for me that you have promised."

"But on my condition hangs my promise," Miriam said quickly. "You had better hear me before you commit yourself too rashly. I will become your wife only when I see and hear with my own eyes and ears that my entrance into your family is approved of by those who belong to you. I ask very little, but that little is imperative. Your sister, Lady Patricia, is staying at The Wolds just now. So soon as I receive a visit from her asking me from herself to do that which you desire, so soon shall your suspense be ended, and our marriage be announced."

Lord Settefeld paused only one little minute, his colour had gone a little and his brows had met in a slight frown; but as Miriam moved away from him almost imperceptibly, he spoke easily, quietly, to—derly.

"Your condition shall be granted and without delay. Patricia will be with you to-morrow to welcome you as her sister and my future wife."

Miriam's eyes dilated with pleasure; her face glowed with colour till it looked like some delicate flower.

"When this is done, I will tell you—perhaps, how much I love you!" she said with that inflexion of deep feeling in her voice that she could produce so easily.

Then, with a movement of inimitable grace, she slipped past him and left him to watch her lovely form as it walked swiftly away through the glory of the fast sinking sun.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY PATRICIA alighted from her horse as she at length reached the low, ivy-trimmed porch of The Wolds, with a sigh of fatigue that spoke a little, too, of mental depression. She had some kind words of thanks for the groom who had attended her home by Lady Stapleton's desire, and she sent the man round to the servants' quarters to rest and refresh himself before returning to Crowhurst.

Patricia did not disguise from herself that she was, indeed, depressed and a little disappointed too.

The news that Miriam Stapleton was come again so closely into her brother's life was as startling to Patricia as it was unwelcome.

Patricia took herself to task as she went up to her bedroom and removed her riding things. It was not like her to be sharp or hasty in her judgment, or to pass any decision on any subject until she had made herself acquainted with all its good and bad points.

In forming her opinion of Miriam Stapleton, therefore, the girl had gone quite contrary to her usual calm, unprejudiced method of forming her mind and passing judgment. She had conceived a very strong and an almost instantaneous decision concerning Miriam, and yet she knew perfectly well that though she might have occasion to study Miss Stapleton in the most intimate fashion, this first impression of distrust and dislike would never pass away.

Lady Patricia was impatient with herself, angry with herself, as she realised this fact.

"It is not just, it is not right," she said to herself as she sat musing in front of the fire in the old-fashioned country drawing-room later on; "it is because I am jealous of Danvers that I feel this aversion to this girl! Oh, I hope not! I do love him, my dear, dear brother, my dear, handsome Danvers; but I could not be so cruel, so unjust as to let my jealousy find evil in her only because she is dear to him!"

She sat for a long time gazing into the coals; there was much to occupy her mind, Lord Settefeld's handsome face, with that restless, almost worried look, floated ever and anon before the girl's eyes.

Then would come the pictured remembrance of Lady Stapleton's sweet motherliness, of Dolly's subdued manner, of Thorold Musgrave's tall, strong form and frank, honest face.

The sympathy Patricia had felt so instantly for Lady Stapleton, had let her understand almost as though it had been written in words, the fact that the mother's heart was not easy where her beautiful daughter was concerned, and this vague conveyance of doubt from one who had the most reason of all to know her child's true nature, came now as a support to Patricia's distrust of Miriam, all marvellously lovely and brilliant as she was.

Though they had only once come together for any lengthened sort of conversation, Patricia was well accustomed to meeting Miriam Stapleton and her aunt in the world of fashion and festivity that constitutes the meaning of a London season.

There were, in fact, very few functions which were not graced by Miriam's lovely young presence.

Patricia had grown used by this time to hearing lavish words of admiration uttered for this girl's beauty, and, indeed, her own poetic mind and artist's eye had been more than frequently charmed by the picture Miriam presented in some exquisite silken gown, at some crowded soiree, or dressed in soft-hued cambic walking in the park with the morning sunshine falling on her delicate skin, and turning her beautiful hair to vivid gold.

Lord Settefeld's intense admiration for the girl was easily justified in his sister's eyes, for who could be blind to such beauty? but Patricia's deep love for her brother was full of eager desire, of nervous dread, and so it was that when that moment had come when she had felt that Danvers was drifting very speedily into a definite danger, Patricia had used the power she possessed with him and had drawn him away from Miriam and her fascinations.

There had been neither jealousy nor arrogance in what she had done; the girl acted as she did because she loved this brother of hers so dearly, because there was no desire so great in her fresh young life as the desire to see him happy with a good sweet-hearted woman as his wife and little children running merrily about his home.

And Miriam Stapleton, despite all her loveliness, would never possess the qualities to make a good wife or to give a husband (at least, such a husband as Settefeld would be), true happiness, sweetest sympathy, and companionship.

It was the knowledge of this weighty truth that crept over Patricia's heart now as she sat gazing into the fire and pondering over the future and its mysteries.

She had no need now to try and understand the meaning of her brother's changed demeanour. Miriam Stapleton had once again bewitched his heart, her beauty had put a veil over his prudence and this time Patricia would be powerless to stand between his fate and himself. There was nothing left for her to do but to pray earnestly and unceasingly that the fears that filled her heart might never be realised and that at least, some portion of happiness and peace, and sympathy, might yet be given to him.

Thorold returned to meet the picnic party with a regretful sense of failure upon him. He was chagrined beyond measure that he had been unable to fulfil Miriam's mission, to have carried back to her the missing bangle and received as his guerdon a word from her lovely lips, a tender little smile, an instant's meeting with her glorious eyes.

The young man's heart, nevertheless, was only temporarily overcast by the knowledge of his failure, the thrill which had come into his being since the first moment he had met Miriam, was there all the time growing stronger each moment as he rode in the darkness over the rough lanes to rejoin her.

Thorold had hitherto lived in such an atmosphere of hard practical work, of steady routine of business, and of necessitous need for labour, that the present influence upon him was something he could not attempt to define or even to understand.

Women as intimates or even acquaintances were an unknown experience with Thorold. While his mother had lived he had devoted himself entirely to her being husband, brother, friend, nurse and son, rolled into one.

His ministrations to this delicate, fading mother and his hard daily grind at his profession had constituted his whole life, then afterwards when he was alone, when the sick room was empty and the soft low voice hushed for ever into eternal silence, the young man had seen less and less of his fellow human creatures especially less of womanhood and women's ways.

His visit to Crowhurst as has been already told was an altogether new experience for Thorold and he could hardly have been brought (taken into consideration the circumstances of his life) into contact with or known more sympathetic girls than those who lived under the hospitable roof of Crowhurst. Had he been by nature a man to amuse himself to dally with the flowers by the wayside, to drink in a moment's fragrance, and then to pass on, Thorold Musgrave would have been more or less prepared to meet, and perhaps, to combat the power of Miriam Stapleton's extraordinary beauty and fascination, but, as it happened, he was the very last man in the world to comprehend the quality of this girl, or to treat as a matter of course the flirtation which she started just for a moment's amusement in the first place, and from a little malicious satisfaction in the second, knowing well this episode would annoy her mother.

He was as a man who, from being confined in a dark underground cavern all his life, was drawn forth by delicate invisible hands, and thrust into the glory of the noon tide sun. He was dazed by the brilliant light, thrilled and warmed into an incredulous and delicious passion by the warmth. He was conscious of the strangeness of the moment, but he was conscious also that this new thing had changed him altogether, and

had taught him suddenly the meaning of life in its vivid most joyous sense.

His heart beat rapidly as he rode for many a mile along the road on which the picnic party were to return. He was in reality very tired when at last the sound of voices in the distance warned him they were close at hand, and indeed, as he drew rein and paused, the big waggonette rolled heavily towards him, and Barbara's shrill girlish voice called out his name in greeting.

"You had all your ride for nothing," Babs said a little maliciously, for she was angry with Thorold without understanding exactly why, "Mimi found her bangle in her coat pocket not very long after you were gone—aren't you awfully tired, Thorold, come in here. There is lots of room. Mimi has driven back in the dogcart with Lord Settefeld—do come in here!"

But Thorold declared he was not tired.

"I will ride close beside you, and we can talk all the time," he said gaily enough, but he felt suddenly chilled and disappointed. The sun that had glorified his heart fell all at once behind a deep grey cloud. He did his best to seem just the same, but no man is good at dissimulation, particularly a man of Thorold's calibre, who possessed none of the femininity which forms part of the construction of some members of the stronger sex. He rallied a little as the lights of Crowhurst came in view, it was not that he had found easy or satisfactory thorough explanation for Miriam's lack of courtesy towards him (for she had distinctly asked him to return, so that he might drive her home at least part of the way), but the pleasurable fact that in a very few moments he would see her again, that caused his spirits to brighten. Thorold did certainly find it a little hard to understand why Miriam should have elected to drive home alone with Lord Settefeld, remembering as he did those few strange words of hatred she had spoken to him the night before; but even here he did not doubt or even begin to doubt.

"Some day when I know her a little better," he said to himself with a new thrill of delight at the possibility of closer communion with her. "Some day she will tell me more about it. I will not ask her—she will tell me, I am sure, when she has grown to feel I am her friend. It is strange to me looking at it now, for he seems a really nice man, pleasant, cultured, and straightforward; but then one must never judge by appearances, and I am quite sure she would never have spoken as she did without some real cause, some definite reason."

A further proof if it were needed to testify to the absolute unworldliness, the single-mindedness, the honesty, beauty, and simplicity of Thorold Musgrave's nature! Neither Miriam nor Lord Settefeld were to be seen when the picnic party trooped into the big hall, tired out with the long day. Thorold's eyes went about him a little wistfully, but, of course, he could make no comment.

Lady Stapleton saw his glance go round, and the sigh that had come before, hovered on her lips.

She was very tender and kind to him, making him sit down and eat some supper immediately he entered.

"You have had a tremendous journey," she said, and then she began talking about Lady Patricia. "Such a sweet girl, and so picture-que with that olive skin and big dark eyes. Dolly and I quite lost our hearts to her!"

But Thorold was not listening very attentively. Through the open doorway he had caught a glimpse of a white-robed ethereal-looking creature coming down the stairs and going in the direction of the conservatory. As soon as he could do so easily he made his escape from the dining-room.

He found her lying back in a low chair, a dream of loveliness under the soft-lined lights and garbed in the clinging folds of a white crepe tea-gown. To Thorold she had the air of belonging to some spirit world. Her face was a little paler than usual. Her eyes seemed like two splendid stars. Her hair was roughened, and fell in loose curls on her brow.

She smiled as she saw him.

"Oh! at last!" she exclaimed, as she moved



"DON'T BE SO PHILANTHROPIC," SAID MIRIAM, WITH THE FAINTEST OF FAINT SMILES.

her gown so that he could bring a chair close to her. "At last! What will you think of me? What will you say to me, dear, kind friend? I am so grieved to have missed you—but," with an almost imperceptible pause, "it was not my fault, Mr. Thorold; indeed—indeed it was not." Thorold did not sit down; he stood looking at her bewildered almost by her loveliness.

"I knew it," he said, answering her a little uncertainly. "I was only too glad to do anything for you, and sorry that I failed."

Miriam lay back in the chair and smiled up at him. Once again the sense of reliance, of possible comfort, was conveyed to her in the individuality of this simple-spoken, earnest man. He was a creature outside and apart from the class of man she was accustomed to meet. Worldliness was not even understood by Thorold Musgrove. He was a child of nature, to be leavened and moulded and fashioned exactly as her two small white hands chose to use him. She had no place for him in her life. He was a worker, a poor man, a being of another world; still he might be useful to her. She might some day have need of him, of his faithful, earnest nature—of his trusting adoration—nay, even of his strong right arm. Yes; she might have need of him—life was so uncertain—strange things happened when least expected—it was as well to be prepared! and so she lay back in the soft cushions of the chair and smiled up at him.

"You are good not to reproach me," she said, quietly, and a little wistfully; "but I know you understand me perhaps better than most people, though you have known me so short a time. But then, you are my friend, and that makes all the difference does it not, Thorold?"

He looked at her reverently, his heart beating wildly; he could not speak very steadily.

"If my poor friendship is any value to you it is yours," he said, after a moment's pause. "It is yours now, and always."

Miriam smiled at him with her lips and eyes, and then she turned her graceful head.

"Ah! father dear!" she said lovingly.

It was her habit to give always a sweet word of welcome to her father, though, indeed, her manner with all her family and her friends was thoughtfulness and gentleness itself. There were few who knew that the tongue which spoke such sweet words could be tipped with gall at times—with falsehoods always.

"Letters for you, Mimi, my treasure!—letters! Don't tell me any one of them has the power to rob me of my bird for another few days at least."

Sir Francis put the letters he held upon the girl's knee, stooping to kiss her loudly as he did so. Miriam laughed.—

"No indeed, father dear! No one shall take me away just yet. Why Mr. Musgrove has not seen me in my real character yet. Remember, we have not had a romp yet, daddy dear! I shall not leave Crowthurst without one of our fine old romps, I can assure you!"

Her father patted her head tenderly.

"Come along, Thorold, we will leave her to her correspondence. She is a very fashionable little bird is my Mimi, and letters pour in on her from every side. Just look! there are two big envelopes sent on by my sister Alicia, both crammed full of letters. Ah! Mimi my darling! I begin to be jealous of all the many new friends you have made. I am afraid sometimes you may be tempted to forget your silly old father."

Miriam answered him in her own bewitching fashion, throwing herself into his arms and resting her head for an instant on his breast; Thorold watching with his heart in his eyes the while; then with a little laugh, Miriam disengaged herself.

"I shall leave you to your cigars and gossip. Good-night, Dad, dearest! Good-night, 'Mr.' Thorold. Pleasant dreams, a' demain! We will repair the gardens together to-morrow. Good-night, again, Good-night!"

Smiling sweetly, just touching Thorold's strong hand with her little fingers, Miriam floated out of the conservatory and up the stairs.

She gave an impatient sigh as she reached her

own room and, flinging herself in a chair, she opened the letters that her aunt had forwarded.

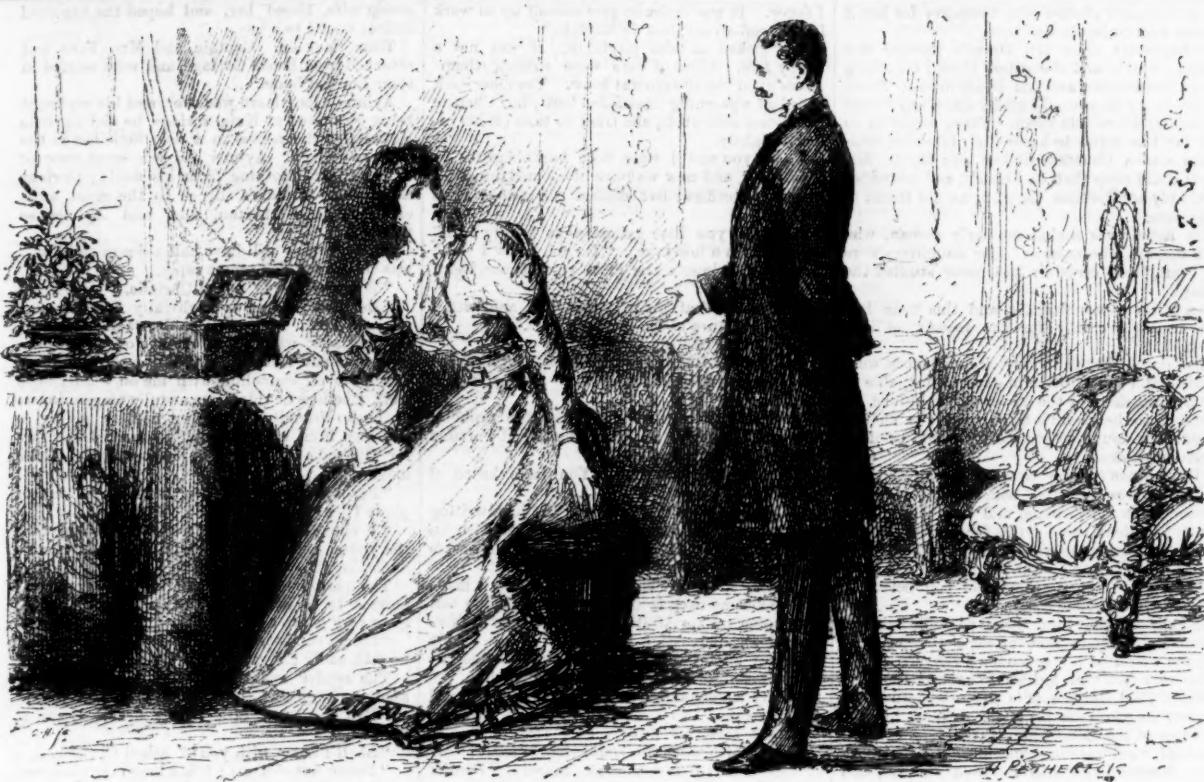
There was nothing important. Some bills, some invitations, some little notes from people who were glad to correspond with the much-admired beauty, Miss Stapleton; a long epistle from her aunt, and a narrow envelope addressed in a middle-class clerical hand.

Miriam's face grew pale and hard as she saw this writing. With a feverish gesture she tore open the envelope, and a half-sheet of note paper fell out. There was no date, no address, only one word written boldly, uncompromisingly in the middle of the paper. One word that could be fraught with the sweetest meaning, or heavy with the weightiest portent of ill: the single word "Remember!"

A sharp ejaculation broke from Miriam's white set lips. With a violent sweep of her arm she flung the paper and the envelope right into the heart of the fire. She knelt and held the poker over the letter till all was consumed. She seemed to have an eagerness, a sort of delight in doing this. But as the paper burst into flame it shone upon her lovely face and there was a cloud upon the brilliancy of the beauty and a frown upon the brow that spoke of a trouble which remained even though the letter was burnt so swiftly.

(To be continued.)

One of the greatest natural wonders in Java, "the fire island," is a large lake of boiling mud, situated almost in the centre of the plains of Grobogana, fifty "paals" to the north-east of Solo. It is almost two miles in circumference, and in the centre immense columns of soft, hot mud may be seen continually rising and falling, like great black timbers thrust forth and then suddenly withdrawn by a giant's hands. Besides the phenomena of the columns, there are two gigantic bubbles near the western edge which fill up like huge balloons, and explode on an average of three times per minute.



"MY DARLING, CAN YOU CONSENT TO BLOT OUT THESE THREE WEARY YEARS?" SAID PAUL, FRANKLY.

FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THEY took the remains of Lord Carlyon home to the Court, and his funeral was attended by all the neighbourhood, gentle and simple, for miles round. A few of the oldest friends of the family, Lord Norman among them, were invited to return to the Court for the reading of the will.

It had been made in Paris almost directly after Iris discovered her husband's secret; it was very short and simple; his dear wife—so ran the document, which was in Dene's own handwriting—being provided for by her marriage settlements. Lord Carlyon left everything he had in the world to go with the title. If he left a child his wife and sister were to be its joint guardians, if his sister succeeded him, he wished his wife to have the right to choose whatever articles of furniture she pleased from the Court, and he made George Armstrong and Mr. Dover, the executors of his will.

That was all. The dozen or so gentlemen gathered in the library thought they had never heard a juster will, and Lord Norman said as much to Mr. Dover, adding the very wording of it seemed to hint that Lord Carlyon had not expected a long life.

"I am sure he did not expect it," was the lawyer's reply, "from the day of his cousin's death Dene Langley was subject to fits of nervous depression; he took up the idea people suspected him of having shot his cousin, and it preyed on his mind. I wish to speak for a few minutes of Lord Carlyon, not the man just laid to his rest but his immediate predecessor, and the strange nature of his death."

Every eye turned towards the lawyer, you might have heard a pin drop as he went on.

"For family reasons it was announced that his mother died in his infancy. That was a false statement, the poor lady was hopelessly insane, she twice attempted her husband's life, and once

her child's. She had been confined in a lunatic asylum for over twenty years when her son died. It was only last month that death released her."

"Then it was suicide after all," said Lord Norman gravely, "and do you know, Dover, I always fancied it in spite of the medical evidence."

"It was suicide," replied the lawyer, "in so far that Eric, Lord Carlyon, left this house—as private letters have since proved to us with the fixed intention of killing himself. His cousin Dene met him in a lonely spot, just when he was going to put his resolve into execution, Dene Langley did his utmost to save his cousin's life, but in spite of his best efforts, the gun went off in the struggle and killed the poor fellow on the spot. From a mistaken fear that his story might be disbelieved, Dene kept silence, and allowed us to find the body and conclude the death was an accident. Gentlemen, it was a fatal mistake, but one that might have happened to any one of us. I can only tell you that for more than nine months the memory of that terrible scene haunted the young man's life, and I do believe did as much as anything else to cut him off in his prime. It is by his widow's wish, and the desire of his sister, the present Countess, that I tell you this. It is Lady Carlyon's intention when she has got over the first shock of her brother's death to spend most of her time at the Court, she could not make her home among you if she believed any of you entertained suspicions of her brother's guilt, both she and her sister-in-law prefer that the truth should be told once for all, and scandal's cruel tongue silenced for ever."

"What Lord Carlyon must have suffered!" said Lord Norman, feelingly, "to know that we suspected him and to have put it out of his own power (by his first mistake) to prove his innocence. Mr. Dover, I don't wonder that the memory of poor Eric haunted him in this house." Carlyon Court was again closed; the dowager Countess had gone back to Fairlawn, which she hoped to rent permanently and make her home.

"Papa wants me to go out to him in America," she told Fortune, "but I feel I don't care for new scenes, I think my love of travel and gaiety has quite died out. I shall settle down at Stevenage and keep a home ready for papa if ever he comes back."

"You will be dreadfully lonely."

"A year ago I should have thought so, but I seemed to have lived an eternity since last September, Fortune. I don't think I could go back to the life of reckless gaiety I used to lead. Besides I have Dene's work to do, his health broke down so suddenly, he was cut off so soon, poor boy, he had no time to make atonement for himself, I must do it for him."

"You see," she went on thoughtfully, "there are a great many dark places in my past life, Fortune, I lived just for myself, I didn't care who I sacrificed to my love of pleasure, and it seems to me now I might try to make things smoother for other people just by way of amends."

Fortune spoke at last.

"You are happier than I am, Iris, in spite of your troubles, you can make plans, you can hope still, and I, I seem to have done with hopes and plans, I feel as though my life were just like a blind road which had no thoroughfare, and led nowhere."

"You must not stay here," said Iris, gravely, "and I think Lady Darnley is a depressing companion for you; why not leave her to me and go abroad!"

"But—"

"But she used to detest me," said Iris, quickly. "Yes, I know, but trouble has drawn us nearer to each other. I believe, Fortune, that if you arrange to go abroad Lady Darnley will accept me as your substitute."

"I have never been out of England in my life," said Fortune. "I don't look forward to anything, I can't; but I long to be somewhere where everything around me is fresh and strange and where no one knows my story."

Lady Darnley, appealed to by Iris, admitted that Fortune did look very white and fragile, and

that a thorough change was necessary for her if she was ever to regain her tone.

It happened that Mr. Dover's partner was sending his wife and daughters abroad for a long tour in Switzerland and the Black Forest. There was no doubt they would gladly allow any friend of the lawyer's to join them. There would be no need for the ladies to know their intended companion was a Countess in her own right. Mr. Edgell could keep that to himself, and introduces her simply as Fortune Langley, an old friend of the Dovers.

Mrs. Edgell was a kind motherly woman, who never opened a newspaper. Her daughters were not "out," and certainly had never studied the peerage.

One of them was delicate, and this tour had been arranged chiefly for the benefit of her health.

The family, though in easy circumstances, were not rich, and the addition of a companion, able to bear her full share of the expenses, would be an advantage to them, while to Fortune the change of scene, the young, bright society would be of in-calculable service.

"If you won't come to me," wrote Chrissie Fane, who was spending some weeks with her husband at Brook Cottage, and had begged Fortune to join them there, "this foreign trip is just the best thing in the world for you; but, dear, you must remember I want as much of you still as I can get. I shall always feel you belong to me more than anyone else."

And she meant it; but for all that Chrissie was wise enough to know that for some time to come Fortune would be better among strangers.

The very fact that Aylmer Fane was the first cousin of Paul Hardy's wife made it impossible that anyone could be his guest without hearing the name of the rising young author.

Indeed, Paul was something more than "rising" now. A second book had followed his first, and London rang with his name as the most successful writer of the day.

He and his wife had spent the season in town, Lord Fane taking a bijou furnished house near the Park, especially for their benefit.

Paul had been counted as a "lion," and Hildred found that society was quite ready to congratulate her on her husband.

They passed for a very devoted couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hardy. They were seen everywhere together.

Paul drove with his wife in the Row. He was present at her afternoon parties, he was her constant escort, and those who knew the engrossing nature of a literary man's work, wondered how he could possibly find time for it, little guessing that Paul was ready to sacrifice even his professional fame to Hildred just to make up for the one thing he could not give her—love.

Chrissie Fane, who saw a good deal of the pair in May and June wondered Hildred could be so blind.

To her it was painfully clear that Paul Hardy pushed every wish and aspiration of his own into the background just to humour his wife's fancies, yet Hildred never seemed to guess it—indeed, she good-naturedly condoned with Chrissie on Aylmer's selfishness in letting his profession and its interests engross him.

Mrs. Fane smiled, but did not explain that her own married life being founded on mutual love, she and Aylmer did not need to be inseparable to convince each other they were happy. The love being mutual the little sacrifices of time and taste were mutual too; while, in a one-sided attachment like Hildred's, Paul took everything that needed self-denial on his own shoulders just as a kind of make-weight for his want of love.

Once, and once only he spoke to Chrissie of the past. It was just before they were leaving town. Mrs. Fane had called to say goodbye. Hildred, busy giving her maid instructions as to packing, kept her cousin's wife waiting a few minutes, and Paul, entering the drawing room expecting to find it empty, could do no less than linger.

"And you are really off next week?" said Chrissie, "do you know I think you'll be better for a change, you look so fagged."

He smiled.

"I've been burning the candle at both ends,

I fancy. It was easier to give oneself up to work in Omond-street than in Mayfair."

She looked at him pityingly. It was not a happy face. Lines of care were writing themselves upon the thoughtful brow. The clear dark eyes had a yearning unsatisfied look; but Chrissie would not notice this, she tried to turn off his remarks lightly.

"Ah! you and I were both humble grubs in those days, and now we have blossomed into full-blown butterflies; but confess the change suits me best."

"Because you have gained what I have lost," said Paul, in a low tone. "Do you know I think yours and Aylmer's the most perfect marriage I know!"

She smiled but gravely this time, and with a strange molitude about her dark eyes.

"I am very happy; but—"

"You think I ought to be the same! Ah, yes; but I am not good at forgetting. Have you seen her lately?"

There was no mistaking to whom the pronoun referred, though he had not mentioned Fortune since his wedding-day.

"Not since Dene died. You have heard of that?"

"Yes. Someone (I don't know the handwriting on the wrapper), sent me a local paper with an account of the funeral. You know there were some strange revelations made, then?"

"Yes. I felt it was some doubt of Dene made Fortune come back to Guildford-street alone last September; I am afraid she will never forgive herself for distrusting him unjustly; yet, surely that one mistake might be forgotten when one remembers how she sacrificed her life to him."

"Only a mistake," said Paul, simply; "and yet it wrecked two lives! I know now that was why she sent me away. Fool that I was to believe wealth and rank could change her."

"Mr. Hardy," said Chrissie, gravely, "I won't pretend to misunderstand you; but the past is past. You and Fortune are severed by your own act more than by her mistake. Don't you think, for your wife's sake, you should forget?"

"And can forgetting come of one's will?" he asked, bitterly. "Mrs. Fane, Heaven knows I act a part. I spend my life, as it were, acting a lie, and sometimes the role is too painful for me, and I almost yearn for death to set me free. Don't be angry if this once I drop the mask and speak the truth. I haven't forgotten Fortune, I never can; to my dying day the past will be my dearest memory."

There was no time for Chrissie to reply. She was thankful to be spared an answer, for almost as he finished speaking there was a rustle of silk skirts, and his wife came in, looking the picture of happiness and prosperity.

A pang awoke Mrs. Fane as she looked at her. Hildred seemed so utterly unconscious of the tragedy going on under her eyes; the slow breaking of her husband's heart in the attempt to feign a love he did not feel. It seemed hard to Chrissie that those other two, Paul and Fortune, both nobler, grander souls than Hildred's, should suffer so cruelly for her sake. It cost her something to sit down and talk amiably to the pretty young matron.

Mr. Hardy, with a word of excuse, left the ladies alone.

"Are you pleased to be going home?" asked Chrissie. "Your mother must have missed you dreadfully."

"Oh, yes," said Hildred; "it's nice to be going home, and Paul will enjoy the quiet of the big library again; he says London stifles him after the calm of Netherton."

"I suppose you will go to the seaside, later on?" said Chrissie, trying hard to think of something to say, but feeling out of tune.

"No, I do not think we shall go anywhere this year. I must be at home till after November, and then it will be time to think of a Christmas house party."

"November?" repeated Chrissie, absently, and not in the least understanding her. "What is going to happen in November?"

But Hildred's vivid blush told her before she had finished her question; and Chrissie, with a

strangely softened feeling towards the pretty

young wife, kissed her, and hoped the expected arrival would be a boy.

Time went on. Captain and Mr. Fane had returned from Brook Cottage, and were settled in their London home.

Aylmer's long leave was over, and his regiment being quartered at Knightbridge, he and Chrissie had settled themselves in a dear little flat in the Chelsea district. Aylmer had wondered once or twice he heard nothing from his uncle; Chrissie ascribed Lord Fane's silence to the great anticipations at Netherton, and told Aylmer so frankly.

"I hope they will have half-a-dozen children," was the Captain's prompt reply.

"Whatever for?" asked Chrissie.

"Because Hildred is frightfully delicate, and an only child would, probably, take after her; and, perhaps, when there are five or six lives between me and Netherton, the dear old man there will leave off consoling with me on what I have lost. I believe he thinks me awfully magnanimous to be so friendly to Hardy; nothing seems to convince him I should not have sued humbly for Hildred's hand, if she had waited a little longer."

"Perhaps he thinks you married me out of pique!" suggested Chrissie, smiling.

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Aylmer, for the young couple were so certain of each other's devotion, they could afford to jest.

The parlour-maid brought in a telegram and handed it to her master. Captain Fane's face grew very grave as he read it.

"I must start for Netherton, to-night, Chrissie," he said, sadly; "read that, it gives me no choice."

The sender was Doctor Gordon, and the message was emphatic.

"Bad accident. Mrs. Hardy dead. Come at once!"

"Shall I come with you?" asked Chrissie.

"Better not, dearest; it is a long night journey, and bitterly cold even for December. You may be sure I will get back as soon as I can."

"You must not hurry away till your uncle can spare you. Poor old man! what an awful blow it must be to him."

And neither husband nor wife found time to wonder whether Hildred's expected baby had arrived, or to remember nothing but that tiny life stood between them and Netherton Castle.

Doctor Gordon met Aylmer at the station and told him what had happened in a few brief words.

"It's the saddest thing imaginable. Mrs. Hardy was driving with her husband when the horse bolted, and they were both thrown out. Hardy has got off with a broken leg, but she and her baby died in a few hours."

"And my uncle?"

"Utterly broken down. He had set his heart on this expected grandchild, and the poor babe only lived an hour. Poor Hardy is unable to move from his bed, and Lady Fane has her hands full."

"My wife wanted to come with me, but I was afraid of the long night journey for her."

"Better not send for her," said the doctor simply. "You see, poor things, they are too full of their loss to bear any attempt at comfort yet. They have sent for you to see to all the arrangements for the funeral. Lord and Lady Fane are just the kind of people to take a delight in having all the trappings of woe as grand as possible. Poor souls, you must have patience with them, Captain Fane, for the light of their eyes has been taken."

And two days later the calamity which had fallen on Netherton Castle was announced to the world through the medium of the "Morning Post":—

"On the first of December, Hildred, the beloved wife of Paul Hardy, Esq., and only child of Lord Fane, of Netherton; and on the same day, Laurence Fane, infant son of the above-mentioned Paul and Hildred Hardy."

Many people who remembered the brilliant young wife they had met only that season in London, felt a pity for the doubly-bereaved husband. One woman, who read the announcement alone in her beautiful country house, felt a pang of sympathy for him, for the sake of auld lang syne.

"Paul is as much alone in the world as I am now," thought Fortune; but never even to her own heart did she confess that there was now nothing to bar his return to her.

CHAPTER XXVI., AND LAST.

IN a London house not far from South Kensington Museum, a man sat before a paper-strewn table lost in thought.

The house was neither small nor large, neither fashionable nor commonplace. It had been built years before by an artist from his own designs, and falling ill, he had been glad, when he was ordered abroad, to let it just as it stood to the successful author, Mr. Paul Hardy.

The study was the largest room in the house; its windows looked on to the broad, white road which led down to the station. Its furniture was substantial, for the most part oak and green leather.

One wall was lined with book-shelves from ceiling to floor; another was almost covered with pictures, a pedestal writing-table stood in the centre of the room, and at it, seated on a revolving library chair, was the author himself.

More than three years had passed since he started for Netherton Castle to fill the post of Lord Fane's secretary, and nearly two had gone by since his young wife's death.

It was August, and London was said to be empty, but Paul was quite content to linger in it. The scent of mignonette came pleasantly in from the window-boxes, and a girl was crying "Sweet Lavender!" in the street. That cry took him back to the last time he and Fortune had met as lovers—how very long ago it seemed, those three years had held for him the joy and sorrow of a lifetime.

Lord Fane would gladly have kept his son-in-law with him; but Paul declared he could not live at Netherton Castle without Hildred, the place for him was haunted by the thought of his dead wife.

The Peer next applied to Aylmer. He and his wife could not be left alone in their childless home, why should not his nephew sell out? everything must be his some day, and an ample allowance should be made him if he would give up his profession and settle with Chrisie at the Castle.

Captain Fane compromised matters. Not for a kingdom would he and his wife have given up a home of their own, but the Dower house, which stood in the park was vacant, and here Aylmer and Chrisie took up their abode near enough to cheer the bereaved couple at the Castle, and yet preserving the sanctity of their own domestic life.

And the experiment had answered admirably. Hildred was not forgotten; but Aylmer's children took a real place in the hearts of Lord and Lady Fane. To the former they were certainly dearer than Hildred's son could ever have been, for they were Fanes and would one day carry on the grand old name.

Relieved of every duty to his wife's parents, Paul was free to throw himself thoroughly into the work he best loved. His published works brought him in three hundred a year, his editorial engagements as much more, while he had plenty of leisure for his own writing.

And was he happy?

Happier far than in the brief months of his married life, when it took all his thought, all his skill to keep from his wife the never sleeping regret at his heart; happier far than he would have been at Netherton, but—lonely and desolate still—feeling somehow that he had missed the chief good of his life, and that in spite of fame and honour he was a failure.

He had never met Fortune, since the winter morning when he saw her in her nurse's garb; but for one thing he would have gone to her and pleaded for her love to be restored to him—she was rich now, while he was—comparatively—poor. How could he sue to Countess Carlyon for her hand?

He knew nothing of Fortune except that she lived chiefly at her Norfolk home and was still

unmarried; but he thought of her every day. She was a living presence in his life, and the little blue chair had been brought from its long seclusion in the Osmond-street garret, and now stood in Paul Hardy's study close to his writing table. If his fancy pictured that chair not empty but filled with a woman's living presence, was it a wrong to his dead wife?—I know not.

A servant came in after a tap at the door, just as Paul had paused in his article to listen to the street girl's cry of "Sweet Lavender!"

"A lady wishes to see you, sir."

"What name?"

"She did not give any, sir; she said it was on business."

Now Paul, like many another author, wrote an execrable hand, and, since prosperity had smiled on him, he often sent his manuscripts to be typewritten. He was expecting a lady typist who had been recommended to him by a friend, and he imagined his nameless visitor to be this same typist, and so directed her to be shown in.

One glance at the lady showed him his mistake.

She was dressed in deep mourning, but her attire had every sign of wealth. It was impossible that she could be seeking to copy manuscripts at a shilling per thousand words.

"I think there is some mistake," he began, gently; but she interrupted him.

"There is no mistake, Mr. Hardy. My husband was once your friend. Circumstances alienated him from you towards the end of his life; but on his death-bed he entrusted me with a message for you. I was unable to give it you then, but I thought, being in London, I should like to call and deliver it personally. I must first tell you my name. I am Iris Langley."

Paul started.

"Lord Carlyon's wife!"

"Dene Langley's widow," she corrected, sadly. "The title brought him little pleasure. He was ill for some months, and, at times, his mind failed; but his thoughts were quite clear when he gave me this message."

"I would have come to him gladly," said Paul, "if you had sent for me."

"I could not send. My sister, Fortune, was with me."

He bowed. He wondered a little why Lady Carlyon had delayed giving her husband's message for two long years, but he was not in the least prepared for what followed. Iris fixed her beautiful eyes on his face, and, with clasped hands, said slowly, as though repeating a lesson,—

"Tell Paul I see clearer now, and I know he was made of better stuff than me. I used to be jealous of him in the old days, but you must tell him that is past and gone. I'm glad that he's going to have Fortune. I give all my share of her to him."

A long silence. The pen had dropped from Paul's hand. Into his face came a yearning look of unutterable regret, and then, at last, Iris went on,—

"Mr. Hardy, you may have heard one story—mine and Dene's. You will know, from the newspapers I sent you after his funeral, a little of the wrong we did, and how he suffered for it. Dene was cut off in his youth. He had no time to seek to atone, to try to put things straight, but he left me to do my share of that and his."

Paul took her hand in his and pressed it.

"It must have cost you a great deal to come here; and, believe me, I am grateful."

"Let me finish," said Iris. "Of all who suffered through Dene his sister is the one whom I am most powerless to make amends. You know that our wrong-doing robbed her of her lover. Because she believed Dene guilty of his cousin's death she parted from you."

"I know."

"Had your wife lived," breathed Iris, "I should never have come here—you should never have had Dene's message—but now—Fortune has no idea of what I am doing, but I felt I owed it to her to come."

"Lady Carlyon," cried Paul Hardy, passionately. "Do you think I am a steel or a stone. I loved Fortune as a man loves but once. My heart has been hers always, even through my married life. Don't you know I should have been at her feet long ago but for her rank and wealth."

Iris looked at him scornfully.

"And you think that would make a difference?"

"Not to her! Heaven bless her! But a man must have some self-respect. How can I, who have nothing but what I earn, propose to a woman with ten thousand a year?"

"You would rather prove your disinterestedness by breaking her heart!" said Iris, bitterly. "Well, I begin to wish I had not given you Dene's message."

"Tell me of Fortune," cried Paul, eagerly. "I have so yearned for news of her. Is she well and happy?"

"She has everything that money can buy," replied Lady Carlyon, "and troops of friends; but you see, Mr. Hardy, there are some women so strangely constituted that they set love above all else, and when that fails them nothing can take its place. Fortune isn't ill or miserable. She doesn't get up about complaining, and she hasn't taken violently to Women's Rights, which, I believe girls crossed in love generally do; but—"

"Go on!" said Paul, huskily.

"Well, when the scene around her is gayest, there comes a look into her face like a child that feels lonely. When she sees two people happy in each other somehow a tear glistens in her eye."

"And she is at Carlyon?"

"Yes, she lives at the Court all the year round. Old Lady Darnley is with her mostly, sometimes I go there. Everything is perfect, the servants and villagers adore her—the neighbours and tenants praise her; but— It seems to me as though she were always wanting something she had once had; always looking for something she had lost."

"Are you going back to her?"

"No. I have only just left the Court. Mr. Hardy, my mission to you has failed, your pride is stronger than your love; but two things I trust to your honour. Remember, Fortune knows nothing of my errand, and she must never hear of it from you."

Paul Hardy's article did not get on that summer morning. He could not fix his attention to anything after Iris had gone. His eyes would wander to the little blue chair, just as his thoughts wandered to the girl for whom it had been bought.

He thought of their future, his and Fortune's, as it looked now; for him a lonely career of hard work, spurred on by ambition, for her a solitary grandeur, with no one to shelter her from the desolate pain which comes to rich women as well as poor, as they advance in life alone—and then he thought of the future as it might be if they spent it together.

Dene Langley's dying message had touched him to the heart, "Tell Paul I give all my share of her to him." Had he a right to refuse the gift made him on Dene's deathbed?

Paul's pride was very strong, but surely his love must have been stronger, for early the next day he started for Norfolk.

Fortune, Countess of Carlyon, sat alone in the beautiful drawing-room at the Court. She looked older than she had done three years ago, but even more attractive, for just as gold is purified by fire, so is a human soul ennobled by suffering, and the face is but the window of the soul. Fortune was doing nothing, a trifle of fancy work had dropped from her hand, and she was lost in a reverie. Through the open door came the sound of approaching footsteps, but she never raised her eyes to see who had entered, supposing it was old Pearman with the tea, only as the steps grew nearer she caught her breath as one smitten by a sudden blow.

"Fortune," said a dearly remembered voice. "My darling can you consent to blot out these three weary years, and let things be as they were when you and I parted that July afternoon?"

"Paul—am I dreaming?"

"No," he said simply, "I told your henchman I was an old friend, and begged him to let me announce myself. Fortune this once I must speak of the past, then it shall sleep in silence for ever. My darling, you know when I met you that February day I told you the history of—my marriage. I tried to make her happy, and I think she never guessed—the truth, but Fortune

it was you I loved, you my heart yearned for all the time. It is because my whole soul cries out for you that in spite of the gulf between a Countess and a poor scribbler, I have come here to-day."

"There is no gulf," she cried eagerly, "and Paul, bend your head closer dear, and listen, I have wanted you always, just as you have me."

Then came a long silence, when two people know that they have won their hearts' desire they have not much need of words.

"Dene wished this," whispered Fortune at last, "he said so when he was dying." And not then or at any future time did Paul betray the secret of Iris's visit. Fortune never knew how much she owed to her sister-in-law—to the woman who was a sinner.

Lady Darnley and the tea came in together, and the astute old lady guessed the truth before she had been ten minutes in Paul's company.

"Make her happy," she said to him gently, when Fortune left them together, "for she has suffered so."

There were no relations to consult on either side. Lord and Lady Fane, who might have considered their son-in-law's second marriage a slight to Hildred, believed Chrissie's story that Paul had only been parted from his first love by a cruel mistake, and that he had belonged to Fortune before ever he came to Netherton Castle, and so, being as kindly a pair as ever lived, they saw the justice of Paul's return to his old allegiance, and their congratulations were warm and true.

It was not a grand wedding, for a countess it was a terribly plain one. Fortune went up to London with Lady Darnley, and one fair September day she was married in the very church where Paul had seen her in her nurse's costume—the very church where they had so often worshipped. Mr. Dover gave her away, and the two Edgell girls were bridesmaids. Chrissie Fane and her husband had come up to London on purpose to be present at the ceremony and—will it be believed!—there was no honeymoon. Paul took his wife straight home to the bright-looking house at Kensington, and they spent the first evening of their married life in the study where the little blue chair was no longer empty. And when Fortune went over the house and recognised all the trifles she and Paul had collected in their days of poverty, when she saw how carefully he had preserved them all, she realised how, even in the days when they seemed parted for ever he had cherished the memory of their love. Mr. Belden returned from America infirm and broken, ready at last to give up his wandering life and settle down in his daughter's home.

And that daughter is not unhappy. As the years roll on Iris tastes more and more of the peace which comes from a patient continuance in well-doing. Dark and evil as was her girlhood, she has risen to a noble unselfish womanhood; her love for Dene begun in sin was yet the salvation of her, for that one unselfish passion purified her soul, and helped her to rise to nobler things.

There is no Dene in the nursery at the Court. Dearly as Fortune loved her dead brother, his name is too full of pain for her to give it to either of her bright-eyed boys. Paul, the elder, or Viscount Langley, to give him his proper title, is very like his dead uncle, while Aylmer has his mother's eyes and auburn hair. Needless to say that the little Viscount is the darling of his Aunt Iris.

And Paul Hardy is a distinguished writer of world-wide fame, a man whom his fellows honour for his genius. His devotion to his wife is evident to all, while for Iris Langley he has a chivalrous kindness, a deep attachment, which Chrissie Fane cannot understand. Paul will never forget that it was through Iris love conquered his pride, and ended the long dark night of sorrow caused by "FORTUNE'S MISTAKE."

[THE END.]

THE oldest dress in the world belonged to an empress of Japan, who lived in the thirteenth century and it has been kept all these centuries in a temple near Yokohama.

THE RECTOR.

—:—

CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

SIR FIELDING was, perhaps, too engrossed with his beloved books and the ever-present cloud of the fore-closing mortgage, to notice the change, but Chudleigh, saw, and troubled over it, but deemed it best to say nothing, thinking perhaps that his sister's melancholy and depression were but the effects of the strange scene on the night of Maurice Duran's arrival.

Before long the Honourable Clarence Hartfield provided new material for conversation by driving through the village at break-neck pace in a gaily-painted sledge, the tinkling of whose bells brought Lady Mildred and Carlotta to the drawing-room window of The Cottage.

"Dear me, there is Mr. Hartfield with the sledge," exclaimed Lady Mildred. "What a beautiful little thing it is! I had no idea he really meant to bring it, had you, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Carlotta, "he looked like it. Hush! here he comes," she added, as the door opened and admitted Clarence Hartfield, his golden hair blown back from his face in waving curls by the sharp air, and his eyes bright with great delight.

"Haw! here I am, you see! What do you think of the sledge? I told the wascal who made it was too highly coloured."

"It is very pretty I am sure," said Carlotta. "Is it quite safe?" she added, smiling.

"Safe!" exclaimed Mr. Hartfield. "Safe! I could drive it full of eggs. Besides, the horses is the quietest thing I ever knew. You could drive it if you liked—would you like?"

Carlotta smiled.

"I should not mind, if there were any occasion for it," she said.

It was certainly very delightful gliding over the ice-bound roads and flying across the lake on the very wings of the wind, and Carlotta's cheeks grew very pink and her eyes bright, in the clear, crisp air.

On their way home they met Chudleigh and Maud going in the direction of the Rectory.

"We have had such a delightful ride, Chud," said her ladyship, "thanks to Mr. Hartfield. Isn't this a singular vehicle?"

"Very," said Chudleigh, glancing at the gaudily painted affair. "Quite American. I congratulate Mr. Hartfield on the acquisition of such a curiosity, and implore him to tell me whence he procured it."

"Where did I get it?" replied Clarence. "Pon my word I don't think I shall let the secret out; everybody will be having a sledge."

"You need not be under any great apprehension on that score, Mr. Hartfield!" said Chudleigh, laughing at the piece of simple conceit. "Our frosts are not usually severe enough to warrant the building of such a piece of magnificence as this," and he laid his hand upon the carriage.

"Chud!" said Lady Mildred, turning to him, where he stood, patting the horse's neck, "come over and dine with us to-morrow, and bring Maud. Perhaps I can prevail upon Mr. Hartfield to join us!" and she flashed round upon Mr. Clarence.

"Most happy, I'm sure," said he, with evident pleasure, while Chudleigh stood hesitating.

"Thanks, aunt; we shall be very glad, shall we not, Maud? Seven, as usual. I suppose?"

"Yes, seven," said Lady Mildred. "Now, girls, you must bring your conference to an end."

And the next minute the sledge was on its way again.

"Who is Mr. Hartfield, Chud?" said Maud as they walked briskly on.

"I don't know," said Chud, absently. "A son of the Earl of Crownabrigg, I think. He's staying at the Folly."

"Staying at the Folly, and driving Aunt Mildred and Carlotta," laughed Maud. "Where are his manners?"

"Perished with his sense at his birth," said Chudleigh, curiously, adding, more graciously, "Not much of ill-manners about it; Lady Mildred knows the earl and countess, and the Folly is Liberty Hall I believe to all its visitors; though

I expect the Misses Gregson are not over-pleased at his defection."

"What's the matter?" he broke off to inquire as he felt Maud start, and looking down saw her staring in front of her amongst the trees.

"Look!" she said, breathlessly. "What is that?"

Chud looked, and saw the tall form of Maurice Duran leaning against the trunk of an old oak, his head bent upon his breast, one hand grasping a fowling-piece, the other hanging white and shapely by his side.

Close by the Rector was a huge mastiff, who, hearing footsteps, raised his head, and with an ominous growl sprang at a clear bound over the ruined hedge and stood ready to spring at Chudleigh.

At the sound of the dog's growl its master looked up, and, striding forward, uttered a command in some foreign tongue, at the same time springing over the hedge and advancing to where Chudleigh, pressing Maud to his side, stood with stick uplifted on the defensive.

At the sound of its master's voice, however, the dog dropped on the ground with instant and most perfect submission, and Chudleigh, turning round with a whispered, "All right, don't seem frightened," to Maud, said,—

"Good-morning; that is a fine dog of yours, Mr. Duran."

Maurice Duran raised his dusky eyebrows.

"That is gracious of you, Mr. Chichester, considering that my rough beast has somewhat frightened you. He is quite harmless," he continued, crossing to Maud, with a perceptible softening of his deep voice.

"Have you recovered from your alarm sufficiently to stroke it?"

Maud looked up, and, meeting the commanding gaze of the dark eyes, felt bound to obey, so stretching out her hand she touched the dog's noble head.

Immediately the animal with a joyful snort commenced licking her hand, and with all a girl's love for big dog Maud bent down and put her arm round his shaggy neck, murmuring coaxing words which seemed to fill the dog with delight; Maurice Duran and Chudleigh looking at the beautiful pair in eloquent silence.

"You are friends now!" said Maurice Duran, so suddenly that Maud started.

"Quite," she said, in a low voice, lifting her large eyes timidly to the weather-beaten face above her. "He is a beautiful dog. Will you tell me his name?"

"His name is Tigris—not because he is like a tiger, but because he has fought one and killed it."

"I am afraid we shall never be able to induce you to quit your solitary life, Mr. Duran," said Chudleigh, with a grave smile. "I am commissioned by my father to entreat you to dine with us to-day, but I fear there is little hope of prevailing upon you to accept our invitation."

Maurice Duran's face clouded for a moment and his piercing eyes wandered from Chudleigh to Maud, who still knelt at a little distance beside the dog.

Then he said, slowly, and with a sad, grave smile,—

"Mr. Chichester, you are right in thinking I love my solitary life. I have lived by myself without a friend—save the dog there till I am unfitted for social life. Still, to prove to you that I am not quite a hermit and anchorite, I will dine with you to-night."

"You will!" said Chudleigh. "Sir Fielding will be delighted. We dine at seven," he added.

"I will be with you," replied Maurice Duran; and with a slight inclination he turned away.

Maud looked up and saw him walking quickly from them, and, patting the dog, joined Chudleigh.

"Hullo!" said Chudleigh, with an exclamation, as he saw the dog motionless where Maud had left it, with its head turned in their direction and whining, "here's the dog," and he attempted to send Tigris after his departing master. But the dog refused to move, wagging his tail and fawning upon Maud. "What a nuisance," said Chudleigh. "I must run after Duran and tell him. It will never do to leave the animal here." and he

leaped the broken hedge and walked quickly in pursuit of Maurice Durant, calling the dog, who still, however, stuck fast to his post beside the beautiful girl.

Maurice Durant looked round as Chudleigh, touching him on the arm, said,—

"Will you call your dog? He seems to have taken a fancy to my sister, and does not look inclined to follow you."

Durant turned and walked quickly back to the road, saying to Maud,—

"I told Tigris to stay by you, and he would do so, unless I recalled him, until the day of his death."

Maud looked up with surprise.

"And leave you?" she said, with an innocent artlessness that was charming.

"Ay," replied Maurice. "Tigris knows that the best part of affection is obedience."

"And he would have followed me home?" said Maud, looking wistfully at the dog, who was stretched at her feet.

"Yes, and shall do so if you wish it," said its owner, reading the wistful look with a calm smile. "He is yours."

"No, no," said Maud, eagerly, even pushing the dog's head away with her tiny hand, "I would not deprive you of him. He is the only—'being you have to love,' she was going to say ingenuously, but stopped and flushed painfully.

"The only thing I have to amuse me?" he said, intentionally misunderstanding her sudden silence, and adding, with a smile, "Not so, there are still the trees and the rocks and my gun. Tigris shall go with you, and if you tire of him, why he can join his master's broken fortunes again," and, lifting his cap from his head, he left them once more, this time unfollowed.

CHAPTER IX.

DINNER was over, and in the drawing-room at The Hall, in a velvet chair, the dark blue of which made her fair skin look whiter and purer than ever, Maud sat thinking of the scene that had occurred in the morning, and, with Tigris's head resting on her tiny foot, she wove an imaginary history of Maurice Durant.

When Maud entered the drawing-room before dinner she started. Durant, in an evening suit, looked strangely handsome, a great contrast to his wild, almost savage appearance of the morning.

At dinner, save for a few remarks addressed to Sir Fielding, Durant had maintained a thoughtful, somewhat abstracted silence. Still his manner and, more than all, the grand cast of his face, kept his taciturnity from offence, and, indeed, Sir Fielding was too pleased with the success of his attempt to coax his strange neighbour to the Hall to risk losing him for ever by forcing him into unwilling conversation, trusting that in time the strange reserve would melt beneath the constant warmth of unobtrusive friendship. Besides, Sir Fielding had sufficient knowledge of the world to surmise that his guest had undergone sorrow and trial enough to warrant the strangeness of his manner and speech, so that the dinner went off very pleasantly, Chudleigh and Sir Fielding carrying on a rambling conversation, Maurice Durant breaking in suddenly with a question or remark, always to the purpose, and Maud speaking seldom and listening when Maurice spoke with a rapt attention.

After she had withdrawn to the drawing-room Sir Fielding rang the bell for a particular old port, but Maurice Durant declined more wine.

"If you will not taste my old port," said Sir Fielding, smiling, "you will have some more claret and a cigar."

But these also were declined, and, after a glass with Chudleigh, Sir Fielding led the way into the drawing-room.

Tigris rose as his master entered, and sprang towards him; but, holding up his hand, Maurice Durant spoke two words in the same language in which he had bidden him follow Maud, and the dog returned instantly to its place.

"That's Corsican, is it not?" said Sir Fielding, who had caught the words.

"Yes," said Maurice Durant. "Do you speak it?"

Sir Fielding shook his head.

"No, unfortunately," he said; "but I chanced to know the two words you spoke. Is the dog Corsican?"

"Yes," said Maurice, almost curtly, and, turning to picture, changed the subject by saying, after a few minutes' examination, "A Carlo Dolci?"

"Yes," said Sir Fielding. "It is good, is it not?"

"Very," was the reply. "It is the finest head I have seen of his save one that was hung above an altar in a small Florentine chapel."

"There are several good pictures in the gallery," said Chudleigh. "Would you like to see them?"

"Very much," said Maurice Durant, "if it would not be giving you trouble. I am fond of pictures."

"Shall we go, then?" asked Chudleigh. "Come, Maud."

The four made their way through the hall and up the spacious oaken staircase to the long gallery lined with various pictures and the family portraits.

Maurice uttered a low exclamation of pleasure and commenced examining them—Sir Fielding, pleased at his evident appreciation of the really beautiful collection, standing at his elbow.

For some few minutes Maurice Durant examined the pictures in silence, moving slowly on. But coming to the grand organ, which stood in a recess built in the middle of the gallery, he paused with an unmistakable air of pleasure:

"Will you try it?" said Sir Fielding. "I fear it has lost some tone, for Maud seldom touches it and I never."

His eyes looked a negative for a moment, and he shook his head; but suddenly he moved, and instead of turning away seated himself at the organ, playing some subtle piece of music, the like of which for sweetness and sorrowful grandeur the listeners had never even imagined.

Mournful to a degree, it brought the tears to Maud's eyes, and caused Sir Fielding's head to droop upon his breast. Gradually it swelled out into a burst of grand harmony, then suddenly changed to a soft, delicious melody born of a dream, and so, gradually growing lower and more mournful, died away like the sighing of a summer breeze.

For a second there was a dead silence, the steady, subdued light falling upon the magnificent head of the player as it bent over the instrument, and upon the beautiful one of the young girl, also bent—but to hide her tears. Then Sir Fielding rose from his seat and advanced towards the organ.

Maurice Durant started at the sound of his footsteps and rose, turning his face, upon which rested such an expression of perfect serenity and peace as might have befit a saint, but seemed marvellously strange upon those sorrow-marred features.

"Thank you, thank you," said Sir Fielding, in a low voice. "I never imagined anything so beautiful."

"Nor I," said Chudleigh, coming from behind, his face likewise moved. "Surely, Mr. Durant, you must be the most glorious organist that ever lived!"

The musician shrugged his shoulders, his face having lost the softness and grown as stern and impassive as ever.

"You have only to visit any Italian cathedral to hear better playing than poor mine," he said.

"Your organ is a fine one; it should never be silent a day."

"It never should be if I had my choice," said Sir Fielding, eagerly, "and you should be its interpreter, Mr. Durant."

But there came no reply, and Sir Fielding recalled attention to the picture. But canvas, glowing as it might be, was but poor game after the rich repast they had enjoyed, and, although Maurice Durant seemed willing to examine the masterpieces closely, Sir Fielding was anxious to take him into the library and Chudleigh to get him to the piano.

Maud had sunk into a seat and let them go on

without her. She could still see them and hear every word spoken, however.

"That is a fine piece of colouring," said Maurice Durant, looking at a dark Dutch landscape. "You have a fine collection, Sir Fielding," he added, "the older ones especially."

"The more modern ones are in the smaller corridor leading to the library," said Sir Fielding, eagerly. "There are some there you would recognise, I have no doubt. Shall we go?—that is if you are not wearied."

And he led the way down a smaller oaken staircase than the one they had ascended by.

"This is the nearest way to the smaller gallery," said Sir Fielding. "It—He broke off suddenly to turn round with astonishment, which soon changed to alarm as he saw Maurice Durant who had not yet commenced descending, leaning against the heavy balustrade in an attitude of terror or some other strong emotion, his face livid as death, even to the lips, and his eyes, which were fixed on a small painting of a woman's head, all ablaze with light.

Chudleigh turned at the same moment, and uttering an exclamation of alarm hurried to Maurice Durant's side.

At the same moment Maud sprang from the recess.

"Papa, papa," she cried, in agony. "He is ill, he is dying!"

And as if forgetful of everything but the distorted face she flung herself on her knees and seized Durant's hand, which hung rigid and lifeless at his side.

At the sound of her voice, and still more at the touch of her trembling hand, the stricken man lowered his eyes from the staring, mocking ones of the picture, and with seemingly a tremendous effort overcame the thralls which bound him.

Standing upright and pressing his closed hand against his heart, he turned with a smile upon his curved lips to the terrified Sir Fielding, who exclaimed:

"Good Heavens! What is the matter? Are you ill, Maurice?" using in the excitement of the moment the simple name that had once been so familiar.

"A mere trifle," was the reply, in hoarse yet regular tones. "I am unfit for polite society, Sir Fielding; I frighten it. A mere nothing," he continued, holding up his hand with a gesture almost of command as Sir Fielding was about to speak. "A sudden pain at the heart with which I am on intimate terms. I beg you not to distress yourself farther concerning it," and they passed on to the other gallery.

It was midnight, and in the dreary Rectory Maurice Durant paced to and fro with impatient restless strides, as he muttered,—

"Even here she follows me! Here, where I hoped for solitude and refuge—here, where I had meant to dwell apart from all—here, where I expected peace, I find her mocking, fiendish face."

Here the bitter soliloquy broke off while the speaker hid his burning eyes in his clenched white hands and groaned.

But presently another thought came to him—the memory of Maud Chichester's sweet face and clear eyes! Could it be, those eyes had within them the dawning of love, if so, at any cost to himself, he must fly; not for worlds would he have involved another soul in the shipwreck he had made of his life.

CHAPTER X.

For some reason or other, it occurred to Mr. Hartfield things would be far pleasanter for himself if his friends the Chichesters were acquainted with his temporary hosts.

Meeting Sir Fielding at a little dinner at the Cottage, he broached the subject boldly, and his persuasions were so successful that the very next morning Chudleigh and his father rode over to the large red-bricked house which they had so long ignored.

Hartfield had advised the Gregsons of the intended visit in a few languid off-hand words,

and the family were on the *qui vive* of expectation when Sir Fielding and Chudleigh dismounted and were ushered into the drawing-room.

"How do you do, Sir Fielding?" said Mr. Gregson, grasping the long white hand in his short red one. "Happy to see you. Quite an honour, sir. Hope you are well, Mr. Chichester. Mrs. Gregson, my daughters—Bella and Lavinia. Met Miss Maud at the mothers' meeting, I believe, several times."

Sir Fielding and Chudleigh then passed over to the ladies, who, all smiles and flutterings, made room for them on the sofa, old Gregson seating himself in an easy chair and commencing a conversation—concerning the weather, of course—with Chudleigh.

Sir Fielding, between the two girls, was highly amused for some few minutes, not insensible to their evident attempts at blandishment, and, thinking after all that they were rather well behaved and quiet, said,—

"My daughter would have accompanied us this morning, but she has a headache. I hope you will accept her apologies and do us the honour of calling at the Hall when next you are near."

Mrs. Gregson bowed, and the girls murmured "Delighted!"

After this the conversation was rather uphill till Sir Fielding turned to the window and made some remark about the grounds.

"Would you like to walk round?" said Mr. Gregson, and, Sir Fielding assenting, the three gentlemen made their way into the conservatories.

Sir Fielding was astounded at their magnitude and appointments.

"This is very beautiful," he said, with admiration.

"That arrangement for the ferns is a splendid improvement," said Chudleigh. "Maud's ferns would be improved if she adopted this plan."

Mr. Gregson looked pleased.

"Well," he said, "the houses are nice, I suppose. They ought to be, for they cost a mint of money—a mint of money," and he shook his head slowly. "But, there, I don't mind, it's a whim of my daughters, and they never have a wish ungratified. 'Papa,' they say, 'I want a conservatory. I want a new pony. I want a set of brilliants.' They have them. Conservatory, ponies, brilliants—no matter what they ask for they get it."

Sir Fielding murmured something which sounded like "Indulgent father, value for money," and the three descended the steps on to the lawn.

As they did so Mr. Hartfield appeared coming round the corner, and, with a noiseless laugh of delight, shook hands.

"Ah, Sir Fielding, delightful morning, is it not? Ah, by Jove I here is young Mr. Gregson," he added as Tom Gregson, in a brown cut-away coat, light trousers, and horsey-looking deer-stalker, came into sight.

"Mr. Chichester, Mr. Gregson. If you want any information about the next handicap, Mr. Chichester, Mr. Gregson's the man. He knows a horse when he sees it. No, no, I don't mean that. I should have said that he's a most excellent judge of horses. Eh, Tom, eh?"

Mr. Thomas Gregson looked half surly, half complimented.

"I am not a bad judge of a horse," he admitted.

"Then come over to the Hall," said Chudleigh. "I have just bought a new hack; perhaps you would be kind enough to give me your opinion of him. Will to-morrow suit you?"

"To-morrow will suit me," said Tom.

Aud with the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room, where the ladies were anxiously awaiting them.

"Sir Fielding," said Mrs. Gregson, tremulously, "will you and Mr. Chichester stay to lunch?"

"Deuced good," commented Clarence Hartfield.

But neither Sir Fielding nor Chudleigh could be prevailed upon, and, after a little more small talk, fa' her and son departed.

For half a mile on the homeward journey neither spoke, Sir Fielding seeming lost in thought, and Chudleigh, who never can any occa-

sion interrupted his father's meditative mood, imitated his silence.

Suddenly Sir Fielding said,—

"Well, Chud, what do you think of them?"

"All is not brass that glitters," replied Chudleigh, epigrammatically.

"That is true, that is true, Chud," assented Sir Fielding, smiling. "I think there is gold beneath the gilt."

"The father is a self-made man, but he is genuine," said Chudleigh. "And his son—well, I can't say I like him," said Chudleigh, "but I suppose we must make them welcome at the Hall."

"Of course," said Sir Fielding, at once, his hospitality horrified at the thought of any half-measures.

Then there came a silence, again broke by Sir Fielding.

"What do you think of the women, Chud?"

"I haven't thought about them, sir," said Chud. "They are very passable. I like Mrs. Gregson, and pity her. As to the girls, well, three weeks of Maud and a month of Miss Lawley"—here his face flushed—"taken consecutively would set them straight, I think."

Sir Fielding sighed.

"It is for Maud's sake, principally," he said "that I have made their acquaintance. My darling has been looking unwell lately, Chud—oh! She is not nearly so light-hearted as she used to be. Looks pale and thoughtful too thoughtful for bright-eyed Maud. What is it, Chud—what is it?" he asked, anxiously.

"I cannot say," said Chud. "I have noticed that Maud has become very quiet lately, and that she looks pale and *distrait*, but I don't hold the clue, sir. Perhaps she wants a little society, and the Gregsons may do her good; certainly they will amuse her."

Sir Fielding gazed at his small feet dreamily.

"She has never been the same girl since the night Maurice Durant came back."

"Ah!" said Chudleigh. "Have you heard how he is, sir?"

Sir Fielding shook his head, and answered,—

"Chudleigh, there is some mystery—I fear a dark one—about Maurice Durant. Heaven knows why, but since his return I have never seen him or heard his name without feeling a chill presentiment of coming ill in connection with him. He makes me tremble, yet I cannot help being drawn towards him, and—ah, Chud, let us change the subject. What do you think Mr. Gregson asked me?"

"Impossible to guess," said Chudleigh.

"He wants me to give him, or rather give the village, that piece of ground at the end of the green on which to build a school for the children."

Chudleigh sighed.

"What did you say, sir?" he said in a low voice.

"I did not tell him that every inch of the ground was mortgaged, Chud; I evaded the request and let him think me a close-fisted miser. Oh, Chud, Chud, if you could know what I suffered in being obliged to refuse that Manchester cotton-spinner a piece of ground, and for such a purpose, when he himself, mark you, was willing to spend his gold in building the school, you would pity me."

"I do," said Chudleigh, with a pressure of the hand.

Then they walked on for a few moments absorbed in their own sad thoughts, but suddenly Chudleigh looked up with a hesitating air, and Sir Fielding, reading it in a moment, said,—

"What is it, Chud? What are you thinking of?"

"I do not like to tell you, sir," said Chudleigh.

"Why not?" asked Sir Fielding. "Speak out, Chud, speak out."

"Well, if you insist upon it, sir," said Chud, still hesitating. "An idea has just struck me. It pains me to refer to the subject, sir, but I cannot help it."

"You mean the mortgage, Chud?" murmured Sir Fielding, without raising his head.

Chudleigh nodded.

"There seems no lack of money there, sir. Mr. Gregson might—"

Sir Fielding winced as if Chudleigh had struck him an actual blow.

"Don't speak of it, Chud! I'll think it over. But oh, Chud, Chud, the Hall under the thumb of a Manchester cotton-spinner!"

CHAPTER XI.

THERE are some courts near Hatton Garden, where a well-dressed person could not be reasonably secure of retaining his watch and chain, or indeed his life if he did not look well after it.

Let us go through one of these, dark and dismal even in the spring sunset—and, pushing open the low door of the heavy-browed public-house which stands at its end, pass into the small sawdusted space before the bar.

Three men are standing there, all of them dark, swarthy-visaged, with jet-black, twinkling eyes, thin lips, high cheek bones, and compact limbs, one would know them for Italians.

Silently for a time they lounge moodily against the greasy bar and its partition, occasionally lifting their wine-glasses and puffing at the tiny cigarettes which they hold between their white toes.

At last the eldest glanced at the clock, stretched himself, and said, in the *patois* of an Italian village,

"He is late."

"When is he not? Tell me, Piété," retorted the second, flinging himself down upon the hard wooden bench, and supporting his head upon his long, sinewy hand.

"Your English is always late!" said the third. "Bah! Baptiste, Piété, be patient. You have not endured this abominable clime nor its detestable people as long as I, Jean, have. When you have you will take these things as the English themselves do—quietly," and with a gleam of his white teeth the third lifted his glass to his mouth and drained it.

"Know you aught of this mission, Baptiste?" asked Piété when the landlord, at a signal from Jean, had filled the glasses and returned to his perusal of an Italian newspaper in a corner of the bar.

"Not a scrap," was the reply. "It is some move of Spazzola's. He told me to wait with you two till six, and he would come with the instructions, but here he is; and he flashed his eyes at the door, which opened to admit a tall, fierce-looking Italian, half concealed by a ragged cloak and a sombrero hat, followed by a short, thick-set Englishman with flat, bulldog features, short oily hair, suit of corduroy, and well-worn velveteen, blue spotted neckcloth, and heavy soled boots; in short, a ticket-of-leave man, and one who looked it as plainly as if he had stitched the ticket on the breast of his short, useful jacket.

Raising his eyebrows as a token of recognition, the Italian sauntered up to the bar and directed a quick gesture at the ticket-of-leave man.

"A go of gin," said he, in a hoarse voice, apparently proceeding from the region of his thick boots. "Hot!" he added, then stood regarding the three Italians with side glances from his small, sharp-set eyes, that were near skin to their own.

The steaming glass of fiery liquor disposed of at one gulp, and a glass of wine having been finished by the Italian, the latter, nodding to the three others, took the ticket-of-leave man's arm and walked through a low doorway into a dark room, followed by the three others.

The door of this apartment Jean carefully bolted, then, taking a whistle from his pocket, he blew three soft calls.

After two minutes' waiting a portion of the floor at a corner of the room was raised in the shape of a trap-door, and, still without speaking, the five men went down—the trap-door closing after them as noiselessly as it had opened.

At the foot of the ladder by which they had descended was an apartment something between a cellar and tap-room, the walls being unpapered and filled with the mould of damp, and the floor covered with thick sawdust over which the feet

made no noise. Two or three tables, a wooden bench, and a few chairs comprised the furniture, if one omits the broken bottles and glasses and a small tin frame for candles dangling from the roof.

"Now," said Spazzola, dropping into a chair and motioning to the rest to follow his example. "Now we are safe, let's to business. First, Monsieur Piété, Baptiste, Jean, let me introduce you to a brother. His name is Bill, his profession is—ours. He has a job which will just suit us, but he had better tell you his scheme himself."

Bill got up with a clumsy movement, strangely contrasting with the graceful play of the Italian's limbs, and said, suddenly, stopping to gulp some gin:

"What I got to say won't take long—it's as plain as a pikestaff and as straight as a jemmy. Your mate here come across me, and being pallish I asked him to go in with a little affair I had on hand. He seemed agreeable if so be I'd take on three more, and as it's allers in affairs of this kind the more on us the merrier, I agreed."

"And the plot—the affair?" asked Jean eagerly.

"Is this?" replied Bill, looking cautiously round, and lowering his voice till, what with its hoarseness and burglar slang, the three could scarcely follow him. "Down in the country, inland, there's a jolly fine chance of gamey bit o' cribbing. It's a old house, regular matchbox stuff to get through, and I believe crammed full o' swag. The only man as lives in it is a crazed parson o' some sort; him and a woman as is deaf and dumb are the only people livin' in it. There's a dawg, but I'd manage him. I'm good at dawgs. Next to the crib itself is a big 'all and several other 'ouses, tidy-sized, so that we could go in for a halffull if so be you'd pluck to run it. Anyhow, this 'ere alone's a good pull and a safe one, and if you'll stand by a cove, fair play—mind no splitting or shirking—we shall collar a lot o' swag."

Breathlessly the men listened, following each word with charmed ears and flashing eyes.

"What sort?" asked Baptiste, in a whisper.

"Plate!" replied the burglar. "Solid lumps, old-fashioned. I've been told that there's chests and chests, cupboards and cupboards full of it."

The Italians rose to their feet with a gesture of excitement, but Spazzola's raised hand warned them into calmness.

"The cove in the crib is a strong 'un. I've see'd him—went down a purpose. He'd be a tight bit if he turned crusty. There ain't to be no shirking."

A sudden gesture of the Italians interrupted him. They raised their hands, and the steel blades of three stilettoes flashed in the dimness.

"Right you are!" croaked the burglar, holding out his fist. "Give us your fins."

CHAPTER XII.

ONCE more the Rectory was deserted. When and how its master had departed only one person knew, and she—the old housekeeper—being dumb, could not tell, even if she chose.

Maurice Durant had departed in the night it was supposed; what direction he had taken it was impossible to conjecture even, for there were no traces of his flight, searched for though they were; for Sir Fielding, even at the risk of the strange being's displeasure should he hear of it, had caused careful inquiries to be made for miles around, but nothing could be learnt.

Much as Sir Fielding regretted the Rector's flight he could not help feeling a certain sense of relief which Chudleigh shared, though why he could not tell.

How much Maurice's absence touched Maud it was impossible to say. She never mentioned his name, and her face gave no sign, though the dreamy, wistful, almost indescribable expression that came upon it when she first met him never left it.

At the end of two months the Folly and Hall were "hail, fellow, well met."

The Chichester visit had been supplemented by Lady Mildred's, and the Folly had returned both.

Then invitations to dinner passed to and fro, followed by rides and drives in the fresh spring mornings, and once the Gregsons gave a grand ball, at which, owing to Sir Fielding's example, some of the principal county families appeared.

The Honourable Clarence Hartfield had suddenly been summoned to town to attend the sick-bed of Lord Crownbrilliant, but he had promised to return as soon as his father was convalescent.

Maud was delighted at the acquisition of new friends, and by her gentle manner, so free from affectation, yet so thorough-bred, she won the admiring devotion of Bella and Lavinia directly, to say nothing of her conquest over Tom, which was very amusing.

He fell in love with her the moment he saw her and showed how hopelessly he considered it by the despairing gaze he always fixed on her when she was in the room, and by the sudden flushing of his round face, and fearful stammer, whenever she spoke and he attempted to answer.

No slave of the ring ever watched to supply his master's wishes with half the feverish eagerness which Tom displayed towards Maud.

He hung about her, waiting with a dogged earnestness for every little chance of being useful.

If she moved to the piano he was sure to have reached it first, and arranged the music-stool with his hand upon the Canterbury ready to find the song she chose to sing.

Lawn tennis involved a world of hard work, for there were the balls to recover, her racquet to carry, and, if she chanced to sit down, the seat to be dragged into the shade or sun.

If they rode out he insisted upon an examination of the saddle-girth and bridle before she mounted. Sometimes he would steal away to the stable and saddle her mare himself; on the road or across the moor he kept as near her as his horse would allow him and watched every move of her steed with zealous care, though Phoebe was as safe an animal as ever carried a sidesaddle.

All these and many other attentions poor Maud took with some embarrassment, but, being too gentle, had not the heart to rebuke or discourage, for she must have had a suspicion one cold word from her would start the unhappy boy off—to Timbuctoo perhaps.

One morning Tom had ridden over with his sister to entice Maud into a ride, and she, at once consenting, the pair were soon cantering towards the Cottage to call for Carlotta.

Tom, by Maud's side as usual, suddenly pulled up, and said, with a hurried abruptness,—

"Miss Chichester!"

Maud checked the mare and turned her sweet face to him.

"Oh, don't pull up," he said, easily. "We can talk galloping—at least, I can—I mean, that is to say if you can, Miss Chichester."

"Oh, yes," said Maud, smiling gently, and patting Phoebe into a gallop again.

Tom, who was left behind by this movement, spurred on, and coming alongside took from his breast-pocket a small letter-case, bound with silver edging and engraved with strange foreign-looking characters.

"I was going to show you this," he said, handing it to her. "I picked it up last night just by the Rectory."

At the mention of the Rectory Maud flushed slightly, and took the pocket-book.

"It's a very curious affair, isn't it?" said Tom, taking the opportunity to edge his roan a little nearer the mare.

"Very," said Maud. "I cannot see any name on it, and all these strange figures I do not understand."

"You mean the queer scribbling on the silver? Neither can I. We opened it last night to see if there was any name written inside, but it's filled with all sorts of odds and ends. Open it, Miss Chichester."

Maud hesitated.

"Do," said Tom, eagerly. "There can be no harm; besides, you will be able to make something of it perhaps."

Maud still hesitating Tom took it from her hand, and unfastening the clasp passed it back to her.

"There it is, all written in some foreign language—Italian, I think, Bell said; but I don't think she knows—anyhow she couldn't make any of it out."

"It is Italian," said Maud, quietly, looking at the first page, and with a sudden gesture almost of fright she closed the book sharply, and, turning pale, said in a low voice,—

"I know to whom it belongs!"

"Of course you do, Miss Chichester," said Tom. "I told them I'd bet a thousand pounds to one that you'd read it. And who is the owner, Miss Chichester?"

"Mr. Durant," said Maud, turning her face away and stroking the mare.

"Mr. Durant—of course; what a duffer I am, he's the fellow who they say is mad—"

"Mad!" repeated Maud, almost fiercely. "Who says so?"

Tom looked positively frightened.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Chichester," he said. "Upon my word—oh, do forgive me. I forgot he was a friend of yours. What an idiot I am, Miss Chichester! I—"

Maud stopped him with a faint smile.

"Pray do not apologise," she said. "You have said nothing wrong—at least you have only repeated what you have heard. Will you tell me anything more they say?"

She hesitated.

"Of course I will—I'm bound to if you ask me," he added, aside. "But you won't blame me for what the idiots say, will you, Miss Chichester?"

"Oh, no!" said Maud.

"Well, it's generally supposed that Mr. Durant is mad all through the village. He does such queer things, you know, walks about the woods there togged up—I beg your pardon—dressed, I mean, in such a queer get-up, and looking like a wild man of the woods. Besides, nobody knows what's going on inside the Rectory, though most of these thick heads think that there's queer diversions there. They say it's haunted, for if you go past there at night time you can hear most peculiar sounds—music, you know, but such strange music—no tune, only a wailing and crying, and sometimes a sudden burst like the cry of a fellow getting an ugly knock. It's a fact, Miss Chichester; I've heard it myself when I've been coming from the 'Chichester Arms'—I mean the village," he corrected, with some confusion.

Maud raised her face to his, and asked, anxiously,—

"Is the music still to be heard at the Rectory?"

"Oh, no, not since he disappeared," said Tom, delighted to continue the conversation. "Not since he's gone. That's what makes it odd. He must have made the row."

Tom, after waiting a moment, said suddenly,—

"Would you mind, Miss Chichester, keeping this thing? I don't know Mr. Durant, and I'm likely to lose it besides."

Maud hesitated for a moment, then said quietly,—

"I will keep it if you wish it, Mr. Gregson, but I don't think it would be less safe with you."

"Oh, yes it would," said Tom.

And he gave it her.

At this moment she caught up to the Misses Gregson, who assailed the pair with a volley of questions and playful reproaches.

"Where have you two been?" said Miss Bella, "for it's cruel of you to keep Miss Chichester all to yourself like this. I wonder you let him, Miss Chichester."

Tom growled something under his breath about minding their own business, but looked radiantly happy, and Maud said, gently,—

"Mr. Gregson has been very kind indeed. We have had quite an interesting conversation."

"Dear me," said Miss Lavinia, laughing, though not ill naturally. "I am astonished; I didn't think you could be interesting, Tom—did you, Bella?"

In the midst of the sister's merriment a pony carriage dashed round a corner of the heath, and Miss Bella, who was blessed with long vision, declared that Lady Mildred and Miss Lawley were in it, and in another minute she proved to be correct, for the pony carriage halted on the road.

way, and Lady Mildred's parasol beckoned the riding party across.

"Well, girls," said Lady Mildred as they clustered round the dainty little turn-out, and poured forth a stream of salutations.

"Mr. Gregson, how do you do? Carlotta and I are going to Chudleigh's flower show. How is it that you are not there, Maud?"

"Too early yet, aunt," said Maud, "it was to take place at three o'clock. Drive round the moor, aunt, and we will gallop round and meet you. That will fill some of the time up."

"I got a letter from Hartfield this morning," said Tom as Carlotta gathered her reins in hand and raised her whip, the girls having already turned their horses' heads.

"Indeed," she said, calmly, her eyes fixed upon the off pony's head. "I hope Lord Crownbridge is better?"

"Hartfield says he's the same," said Tom, "but I don't think from what I hear that his lordship is likely to pull round."

Carlotta, still keeping her eyes fixed, said—

"I am very sorry to hear that."

"Yes," said Tom, "it's a bad job. Hartfield is the next Lord Crownbridge, you know."

The next moment he was alone, the ponies, obeying a sudden pull, started off with sufficient spirit to jerk Lady Mildred's parasol from her hand, and spinning away at a pace which Tom mentally pronounced "stunning."

(To be continued.)

In Poland and Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, and the Vosges, an alcoholic liquor is made from plums by distillation, and extensively used in these countries. This liquor imitates the Kirschwasser, or cherry spirit, but it does not possess its aroma, flavour or delicacy.

At the North Pole there is only one direction—south. One could go south in as many ways as there are points on the compass-card, but every one of these ways is south; east and west have vanished. The hour of the day at the pole is a paradoxical conception, for that point is the meeting-place of every meridian, and the time of all holds good, so that it is any hour one cares to mention. Unpunctuality is hence impossible.

BALATA is obtained from the milky juice of the bullet-tree, a native of Guiana, as a caoutchouc-like mass which can be kneaded at a temperature of 49° C. and melts at 149° C. Balata is said to be superior to gutta-percha, possessing a greater elasticity, and being less soft at the ordinary temperature and less hard in the cold; it also possesses more resistance to the action of light and air. Balata costs more than gutta-percha, its price being, of the crude products, four shillings per gallon, whilst that of the pure and dry article, according to the *Journal of the Society of Chemical Industry*, is one shilling per pound.

THE result of six months' observations of Mars have led Mr. Schaefer, of the Lick Observatory, to the conclusion—contrary to the generally-received views—that the dark portions of the disc represent land and the light portions water. This is supported by observations of San Francisco Bay from Mount Hamilton, in which the bay appears brighter than the neighbouring valley and mountain at the same distance. On this hypothesis the "canals" would correspond to ridges of mountains almost wholly immersed in water, while their doubling may represent parallel ridges, of which our own earth furnishes examples.

ONE of the most remarkable machines invented by Edison is a little instrument by which the operator can sign his name to a document over one hundred miles distant. The writing to be transmitted is impressed on soft paper with an ordinary stylus. This is mounted on a cylinder, which, as it revolves, "makes and breaks" the electric current by means of the varying indentations on the paper. At the receiving end of the wire, a similar cylinder, moving in accurate synchronism with the other, receives the current on a chemically prepared paper, on which it transcribes the signature in black letters on a white ground.

THE BARRINGTONS' ESTRANGEMENT.

—10:—

(Continued from page 199.)

"I believe Monica longs for her husband. I can't explain anything without betraying her secret; but Mr. Trevor, of this I am certain, she loves Mr. Barrington as well as the day she married him."

So the months rolled on. Monica battled with her depression and took up again the burden of life bravely, she was her father's companion in walks and drives, little Barbara's favourite playfellow. Only on two points she was unconquerable, nothing would induce her to return to Trevor Court, and no persuasions could make her accept a single invitation.

"I don't want to go into society," she would say gently, "I can't explain it to you, mamma; but I don't want to make new friends."

And seeing she was in earnest, her parents gave up the conflict, they were only too thankful for the change in her. Her old sweetness and cheerfulness seemed to have returned to her, and she was once more the sunshine of her home. She took music lessons that she might be able to teach Barbara later on; but when Alice May was persuaded to join in these lessons, and the professor told her she had a fortune in her voice, and that it was a shame to hide such a gift in the obscurity of private life, Monica pleaded with her friend not to leave them.

"I dare say our professor is quite right, and you would be a celebrity; but, Alice, I can't spare you; if you go away I should fall back into the listless spiritless wreck I was when you first came here."

"I will never leave you while you need me," said Alice, warmly; "and, Monica, I think I must have been born without ambition, I don't want to be famous or celebrated, I would rather be a home-woman."

"That is just what you are," said Monica, "you seem just to creep into one's heart and make one love you, you must be mother's second daughter and stay with us always."

But though Sir Francis and Lady Trevor were quite content with this arrangement, there was one person who decidedly objected to it. Douglas Trevor was backwards and forwards a great deal at St. Mirian's, and long before Alice had been there a year his mind was made up. He loved this brown-eyed girl as he had not thought it in his nature to love at all. His one desire was to win Alice for his wife, and take her home to Trevor Court, where at his uncle's wish, he spent most of his time.

He waited for some months, for he loved Alice so much, that he could not bear the thought of a refusal, then one summer's day, walking by her side among the sweet flowering rhododendrons, he told his story.

"My darling," went on the strong man, passionately, "only come to me and I will make you happy if human love can do it. I believe, Alice, I have cared for you ever since I saw you first, nearly two years ago, at Bournemouth station. I am only a grave morose fellow compared to you, but it is my whole heart I offer you."

"You have been my best friend ever since I came to St. Mirian's, but—I never dreamed of this."

"Why not? Did you think me a stick or a stone that you imagined I could see you constantly, and not long to make you my own?"

"I thought," her face was crimson, "you cared for Monica!"

"For another man's wife!"

"Oh, forgive me," there was a pathos in her tone, "I did not mean that, I thought you had cared for her long ago, and that you would never put anyone else in the place that had once been hers."

"I cared for her as a little sister, a pet playfellow, not as a man should care for his wife; it is you I love, you I want. Oh, Alice, don't tell me it is all in vain, and that you have done your loving."

"I thought I had," she said slowly; and then she told him the story of her attachment to Vernon Clifford.

"It was all over before I came here, indeed, when I found out how different he was from the ideal I had cared for, I think my love vanished at a blow. I heard of his marriage without a single regret."

"Then surely the memory of your past regard for him need not come between us. Alice, can't you care for me?"

The girl's sweet face was crimson.

"I do care," she said in a whisper, "there have been times when I envied Monica the love you—as I thought—poured out on her."

"Then it is settled," cried Douglas, joyously, "and you will be my wife?"

"I cannot."

"Alice," and Mr. Trevor actually gave the hand nearest him an affectionate little shake, "you are talking riddles, if we love each other what is there to part us. My uncle and aunt are fond of you already, and will welcome you gladly as their niece."

"I cannot leave Monica."

Douglas looked bewildered.

"Monica has her parents and her child. She might, but for an extraordinary caprice, have also a tender loving husband. I have no one in the world but you."

"Listen!" said Alice, simply. "When your cousin told me her story I promised never to leave her while she wanted me. Of course I can do little for her compared with her father and mother; but, you see, I know her trouble, and they do not. She likes to talk me of—of the past. I believe that if she had no one to confide in, and had to brood alone over her sorrow, she would fall back into the morbid state in which I found her."

Trevor took an abrupt turn up and down the narrow winding path, then he stopped suddenly and sat down again at Alice's side.

"I believe you are right; but, Alice, it is desperately hard! Why should we be sacrificed to Monica? Why should we be parted because she has a fancied grievance against her husband?"

Alice sighed.

"It is not a fancied one."

"You mean you think she is right in her conduct? I have never realised that. Poor girl! there may be ample cause for the estrangement between her and Barrington."

"I think," said Alice, speaking very slowly and pausing to weigh her words, "I think, believing what she does, Monica could not have acted differently. But I hope, against hope, she is mistaken. In her place I would have seen Mr. Barrington and had an explanation."

"He was in England this spring. Poor fellow! he came to me for news of Monica. He looks like a man whose heart is almost broken."

"And he gave you no clue?"

"He said, when I pressed him, that Monica had accidentally discovered a secret of his which she bitterly resented. He assured me it was nothing which could in any way interfere with her happiness or comfort, and that he should have told her of it, but that it concerned another person even more closely than himself. He said he could not understand anyone of Monica's gentle, clinging nature, taking up such a thing so bitterly."

"Mr. Trevor!"

"Don't you think, child, it's almost time you began to call me Douglas?"

"Douglas, then! Where is Mr. Barrington?"

"Goodness knows, I don't. He's generally wandering aimlessly about, from one country to another. When he's in England he generally comes to see me."

"I want to see him."

"You!"

"I passed my word I would not mention Monica's confidence to you or her parents; but I never said I would not speak of it to Mr. Barrington. I believe, from what you tell me of him, that your cousin has taken up a terrible mistake, and that one interview with her husband would put things right. She will not see him, but—I might."

Douglas looked at her fondly.

"And when you have settled the Barringtons' difficulties, will you come home to me?"

"Don't you know that I am not fit to be a great lady?"

"I don't consider myself a great gentleman. Nay, Alice, you have confessed you love me, and I won't hear of any more difficulties. Put your hand in mine and promise that, when you have reconciled Monica to her husband, you will become my wife."

"I may fail."

"I think not. This is July, and if Mr. Alan does not turn up shortly, I shall be at the trouble of going to find him; for I don't intend our happiness to be postponed for many months."

But either Alice had persuaded Douglas to have patience, or the fact that Alan Barrington's bankers expected him in London in November, had some influence over Mr. Trevor, for at the time of little Barbara's accident, he had not yet started on his search for his cousin-in-law. He came down to Bournemouth with his uncle on hearing the bad news, and was as kind and gentle to Monica as though he had been her brother.

"When the little one is better, don't you think you had better write to Alan?" he asked her one day. "Some garbled account of the accident is sure to reach him; and, little as he has seen of her, he loves his child dearly."

"I will think about it. Douglas, you don't think Bab is in any danger?"

Douglas hesitated.

"I don't know much about children, her recovery seems to me very slow. Your father was speaking to Clifford to-day about further advice. I don't like the fellow, but to do him justice he made no difficulty. Doctor Burns, the specialist in such cases, is coming here to-morrow. They asked me to break it to you, but I'm afraid I have fulfilled my mission clumsily."

"Douglas," the blue eyes were fixed entreatingly on his, "do you think Bab will die, as my punishment? I used to think I should be thankful if she were taken from the evil to come; but I love her so, and she is all I have. Don't you think Heaven will be merciful and spare her—my little child?"

Douglas Trevor's eyes were not quite dry as he pressed his cousin's hand.

"Please Heaven, we'll pull her through, Monica. Where is Miss May?"

Mother sent her out for a few minutes. She has sat up so many nights, and she looks quite pale and ill. In the sunshine it's almost like summer still. We thought the air would do her good."

Little did they guess at whose side Alice May was walking to-and-fro among the pines.

She had hardly got clear of St. Mirian's when a tall, bronzed, soldierly-looking man, who had been watching just outside the gate joined her, and, lifting his hat, said eagerly,

"Miss May, I believe? How is the child?"

It never entered Alice's head to ask his name. She seemed to know by instinct that this was Monica's husband.

"She is not so well to-day. Dr. Burns is coming from London to-morrow."

"You are to be trusted, Douglas Trevor told me so. Miss May, I am Alan Barrington, and I must see my child before she dies."

"Indeed, it is your right," said Alice, quickly; "but, oh, Mr. Barrington, there is still hope. Heaven would not take little Barbara, it would break her mother's heart."

"And has not her mother well-nigh broken mine by her cruel pride and resentment?"

Alice looked straight into his face.

"Mr. Barrington, I have wanted to see you for a long time. I am your wife's friend. I believe I am the only person in England who knows why Monica left you."

"And you uphold her in her cruel revenge?" he said, passionately.

"I believe she is acting under a terrible mistake, a cruel delusion. Mr. Barrington, I have longed to see you face to face just once that I might tell you the truth, and hear from you if Monica has indeed been mistaken."

"I believe you have a good heart," the man admitted. "Anyway, I don't mind trusting you if my wife has done so. I am not ashamed of

the reason for which Monica left me. I would have told her parents and Douglas Trevor gladly only that her one request was for me to keep the secret."

He paused. They were standing together on one of the footpaths among the pine woods. No house was in sight. Above them was the clear, blue sky, beneath, stretching far away into the distance, the broad, restless sea. Alice fixed her eyes upon Barrington's face as though it was her own doom he was to pronounce.

"I had one brother," began Alan, slowly, "my second self. We never had an ill word until some five years before I met Monica Trevor, Lionel married a beautiful flower-girl, lovely enough I grant in face and figure, but in all else utterly unworthy of him."

"Go on," said Alice, huskily.

"For three years I heard nothing of him, when he was dying, he sent for me. His wife was hopelessly insane, her recovery was impossible. Would I for auld sake's sake accept the post of her guardian and do my best for her when he was gone. There was not another creature he could ask. He had but a life interest in his property, if he died childless everything passed to me. To my mind, Miss May, refusal was impossible."

"Indeed it was."

"I did my best for poor Carlotta, keeping her beneath my own roof until my engagement to Monica. Unluckily the poor creature had taken up the delusion I was her dead husband, whom I much resembled. When I was on the point of leaving England I placed her in Dr. Tring's asylum, where I know she had every comfort. I visited her myself twice a-year. My wife, after a time expressed some curiosity about these journeys of mine, and I should have told her the truth; but that I had discovered she had almost a morbid horror and terror of the insane.

"My brother's wife was of course no blood relation. It was utterly impossible her malady could affect me or my children; but knowing Monica's unreasoning terror, I kept my secret. Fate was against me. Visiting a friend who chanced to have a house adjoining Dr. Tring's asylum, Monica saw me there with Carlotta. She easily discovered the relationship between us. When I returned home, my wife and child were gone."

"I received a letter from Monica telling me she had sought her father's protection, and that she would never see my face again. She had discovered my secret, and while Dr. Tring's patient lived she would never return to me. She asked but one thing at my hands, that I would keep the truth from her family."

"Poor Monica!"

"Ah, you pity her! Yet, save the wound to her pride, I cannot even now understand the harm poor Carlotta's existence did her."

"I have listened to your story, now will you hear mine," said Alice. "Monica went to the asylum after you had left it. She was told that the girl she had seen with you was Mrs. Barrington, and that she had been placed in the doctor's care by her husband."

"Miss May!"

"I don't say Monica was right in refusing to see you," went on Alice, "but she was heart-broken. It seemed to her this poor insane creature had been put away to make room for her. Carlotta had entered the asylum within a month of Monica's wedding, that wedding which, as she thought, poor girl, made her no wife, and left little Barbara 'nobody's child.'"

"No wonder she was angry," said Alan, slowly. "What she must have suffered. I wonder it did not kill her."

"It well nigh did. Through it all she loved you too well to give you up as she believed to her parents' revenge. Mr. Barrington, it was a mistake, but remember she believed it. Think what a living torture the last five years must have been to her."

CHAPTER VI.

"BARBARA is better now. Where have you been? She has been asking for you. I expected you back long ago."

This from Monica Barrington, meeting Alice in the hall after what the anxious mother considered an unpardonable delay.

Miss May drew her friend into the beautiful conservatory and closed the door.

"I won't keep you long, but you must listen to me. I have been with Barbara's father. He had heard of the child's accident. Anxiety for her brought him to Bournemouth, and, oh, Monica! we must be thankful for it all our lives. It was all a terrible mistake, dear. The girl you saw at Dr. Tring's asylum was your sister-in-law."

"They called her Mrs. Barrington."

"And it is her lawful name. She is the widow of your husband's elder brother. Oh, Monica! to think that you need not have suffered all this misery."

The tears rained down Monica's face.

"Alan will never forgive me."

"He is coming to answer that himself. He only gave me five minutes start to break the news."

Father and mother stood hand-in-hand by Barbara's bedside. It seemed that the improvement in the little one had only been temporary. Vernon Clifford admitted she was in great danger. He spent the night at St. Mirian's. It was a relief to them all to feel a doctor was at hand, though he could do little for the sufferer.

Lady Trevor sent Alice down to give him some breakfast early in the cold grey autumn morning, before he went back to the Dene to his social duties there. He was to return at eleven with Dr. Burns.

"I hope your wife is well," said Alice, feeling for auld lang syne she could not treat him quite as a stranger. "We do not know many Bournemouth people, but I have heard what a wonderful success you are making at the Dene."

"The proprietors are making," corrected Vernon. "Fifty pounds a year and free quarters represents my share of it. I have had to curb my ambition, Alice. I didn't think in the old time to be content with such a post."

Miss May did not like this use of her Christian name, but could hardly tell him so. She was thankful that Douglas knew her past acquaintance with Mr. Clifford, and wished devoutly her fiancé would come to break in on the *tête-à-tête*. For the engagement was a public fact now. When Alan Barrington and his wife had "kissed again, with tears," Douglas felt his time was come, and, in a few words, presented Alice to his uncle and aunt as their future niece.

"Have you been here ever since you left Dering?" asked Vernon, presently.

"Yes; ever since."

"Well, you seem to be in luck's way. You'll find the difference if you have to take another situation, and I am afraid nothing can save that poor child upstairs."

Enter Douglas Trevor in time to hear the last words.

"I am sorry you think so badly of my poor little cousin, Mr. Clifford," he said courteously; "but Miss May will not require to seek another situation. She is my promised wife, and whether little Barbara is spared or taken, I hope our wedding will be before the year is out."

Vernon Clifford hardly knew how he walked home—if the Dene deserved that name. Alice May, whom he had thought too poor and obscure to share his fortunes, the promised wife of Douglas Trevor, a rich man now, and a powerful baronet in the future. He felt he must share the wonderful news with someone, so he told Helen.

"Douglas Trevor! Why he's one of the leading men in Northshire. Don't you remember we were always hearing of him at Savory? Well, that quiet little mouse must have played her cards well!"

Barbara Barrington did not die. She recovered wonderfully after Dr. Burns' visit, and her parents took her to Mentone, where they were going to spend the winter and enjoy a second honeymoon; and before they left Bournemouth a very handsome cheque rewarded Mr. Clifford's services.

But, alas, Vernon's creditor's had grown uneasy. The exact amount of his salary had got about, also the fact that he possessed no private means. Bills which in other cases would have waited months,

were sent in with immediate demands for payment. *Mrs. Clifford's* creditors followed suit.

The demands being disregarded, summonses were issued. It got to the ears of the Committee, who told Vernon he was a disgrace to the town, and paid him three months' salary instead of notice, on condition that he left the Dene at once.

In cheap lodgings, in the least desirable part of Bournemouth, Mr. and *Mrs. Clifford* found life very trying. The nursemaid was dismissed, the twins were neglected, things went from bad to worse, until at last Helen Clifford put her pride into her pocket, and went to St. Mirian's to try and extort a loan from *Mrs. Trevor*.

Sir Francis and his wife were back at the Court now, and had lent their Bournemouth home to Douglas and his bride for the first months of their married life.

When *Mrs. Clifford's* name was brought in Alice and Douglas were sitting over the fire reading their letters.

"You had better let me see her, dear," suggested *Mr. Trevor*, "she only wants money, and I don't mean to have you bothered."

So *Mrs. Clifford* was shown into the library, and *Mr. Trevor* inquired "what he could do for her!"

The miserable woman burst into tears and began a long tale of her idle, worthless husband, her starving children, etc.

"Clifford would never have been idle if you had not destroyed his self-respect," said *Mr. Trevor*, gravely. "Now listen to me. To his skill we owe in a measure my little cousin's life, and you are both in a sense old acquaintances of my wife. I will pay *Mr. Clifford's* debts on two conditions. That he consents to accept a post I think I can obtain for him as ship's doctor, and that he does his best to obtain his M.D. degree within two years."

"But what is to become of me?" demanded Helen, "and the children."

"I make no doubt your father will give you a temporary shelter. *Mrs. Clifford*, I am sorry to use strong language to a woman, but you have done your best to compass your husband's ruin. His only chance of keeping his head above water is the plan I suggest. I will give no assistance unless it is carried out."

Vernon Clifford sailed for South Africa on board the good ship *Paris* early in the new year.

Helen and the twins went back to Dering, the former full of anger at her untoward fate.

Mr. Trevor himself saw his *protégé* off at Southampton. When he returned to St. Mirian's and described the parting to his wife he said, simply

"I was bound to do the best I could for the poor beggar, you see, Alice, since only his own folly left you free for me."

There were tears in her eyes as she answered,

"I can never thank Heaven enough that our boy and girl attachment came to nothing; but, Douglas, just because of those old childish days I am glad you were able to help him."

"I understand, sweetheart," answered her husband, "you will always feel an interest in Vernon Clifford for auld sake's sake. And I owe him something, since if he had been a wiser man you would not have come to Bournemouth to end the *BABBINGTONS' Estrangement*."

[THE END.]

A WOMAN inventor has constructed a table which will wait upon itself. The table is round, and the stationary space for plates, etc., is about ten inches wide. Within this circle is a revolving disc an inch or two higher than the stationary part. On this the food is placed, and a simple turn will bring the desired article within reach.

A SCIENTIFIC writer says that night is the time which nature utilizes for the growth of plants and animals; children also grow more rapidly during the night. In the day-time the system is kept busy disposing of the wastes consequent on activity; but while asleep the system is free to extend its operations beyond the mere replacing of worn-out particles; hence the rapid growth. This is why invalids need so much rest and sleep.

FACETIE.

"THE silent watches of the night" must be those that we forget to wind up.

"ZAT man," exclaimed the excited Gaul, "ees one ex-cr-r-able, emfamous liar-r-r! I weel tell eem so in plain English."

"YOU call that a saddle-horse?" "Well, it's this way, the brute's worth nothing, and I'm saddled with it!"

CLARA: "Mr. Nicefello said my face was classic. What is classic?" DORA: "Oh, most anything old."

LITTLE MABEL (to chemist): "Please, sir, have you got anyfin' dat's good for havin' swelled a sinple?"

SHE drew him out: "No," said Miss Kittish, airily, "the best is none too good for me." "Then permit me to offer myself," said Mr. Dolley, promptly.

"ANOTHER lie nailed," murmured the lawyer, as he looked at the "Back in twenty minutes" sign he had fastened to his office-door, and then started off for the races.

WHEN he begins to say it was his fault, and she begins to declare it was hers, walk softly out of the room. That is the kind of a difference of opinion that leads to an agreement.

DEVOTED LOVER: "You fairly shone at the ball last night." NERVOUS SWEET ONE: "Well, I couldn't help it, darling. I put enough powder on to dry up an ocean."

THE REV. DR. BARREL: "I can't get the introduction of this sermon worded just to suit me." MRS. BARREL: "Why don't you start it with, 'As has been said before, and so well said!'"

"JOHN," said his wife, "what are you doing?" "Figuring," he replied. "Figuring on what?" "On which we can better afford to do; buy coal or use the pa-lour furniture for fuel."

"I THANK you, sir, for your kind permission to call on your daughter." "Remember that I turn out the gas at ten o'clock." "All right, sir; I'll not come before that time."

TEACHER (hearing arithmetic class recite): "Mike, if you should see seven birds on a tree, and should shoot three of them, how many birds would remain?" MIKE: "Nary one, mum; the rest o' them would be after flyin' away."

SAIDSO: "Humbug's gallery of ancestors is the bluest of the blue." HERDSO: "One would never surmise he had blue blood in his veins." SAIDSO: "He hasn't; but he knows a good ancestral portrait when he sees one."

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.—MAUD: "How is it that people always say that the waist of the Venus of Milo is perfection? It seems to me that the women in ancient times had larger waists than they have now." LINDA: "Perhaps, dear, the men had longer arms."

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, REX?" remarked Miss Flossie to her mastiff; and as the noble animal winked cheerfully and laid a portion of Charles Henry's Sunday trousers at her feet, she continued, "You bad doggie, I'm afraid you've been off on another tear."

MR. WAYBACK: "Great Scott! What you got the hired man plowin' up the front yard for?" MRS. WAYBACK: "Our darter says the first pictur' she takes with her new camera will be the house, and her book of instruction says she must break up the foreground, but, of course, she can't do that herself."

"Did you win that breach of promise case you conducted?" asked Jarley's friend. "No," answered the young lawyer, bitterly. "My client insisted upon appearing in court." "And then?" "When the jury saw her, they brought in a verdict of temporary aberration on the part of the defendant."

LADY (travelling in Italy): "The brigands have stolen my husband and my pug dog." OFFICIAL: "We shall have to act very delicately in the matter, madam, or the brigands may put the captives to death." LADY TRAVELLER (excitedly): "Tell them ransom shall be paid. Fido shall not die."

DR. DOS'EM: "Here is a letter it would hardly do for us to publish. A man writes:—'I have just taken my first bottle of your medicine, and I——'" SECOND QUACK: "Well?" DR. DOS'EM: "There it breaks off short, and is signed in another handwriting, 'Per Executor.'"

MRS. COTA ARMS: "You take great interest in outdoor sports, I believe, Mr. Zing?" MR. ZING: "No-o-o, I can hardly say that I do." MRS. COTA ARMS: "Well, now, I was told by some one that you were quite a counter jumper. I presume he must have been mistaken."

"I SHOULD like to know when you are going to pay that bill; I can't come here every day in the week," said Mr. Snips, the tailor. "Oh, I don't want you to do that. What day would suit you best?" "Saturday." "Very well, then, you can call every Saturday."

MERCHANT: "Did you deliver my message to Mr. Smith?" BOY: "No, sir. He was out, and the office was locked up." MERCHANT: "Well, why didn't you wait for him, as I told you?" BOY: "There was a notice on the door, saying 'Return at once,' so I came back as quick as I could."

IT was merely a single eyeglass that the young swell wore, and Uncle Hayrick had never seen one before. "Jes' look at that!" he exclaimed to his wife, under his breath. "What's the meanin' on it, do you think?" she inquired. "I d'no—unless, maybe, he's buyin' his spectacles on the instalment plan."

"JUST one," said the lover, as he stood upon the step with his girl, "just one." "Just one," said the mother, putting her head out of the bedroom window above; "well, it isn't as late as that, but it's pretty near twelve and you'd better be going, or her father will be down." And the lover took his leave with a sad pain at his heart.

DISTRACTED HUSBAND (of literary wife): "Made-line, Madeline! I hear the baby crying and I can't find it anywhere. Don't you think where you put it?" LITERARY WIFE: "Have you looked in the piano and the refrigerator?" DISTRACTED HUSBAND: "Yes, yes!" LITERARY WIFE (resuming her pen): "Then I must have placed it temporarily in the bookcase."

FOGG: "I don't see Grimaby with that Lute-string girl lately." FOGG: "No; when he spoke of marriage she frightened him off. She said, in an impassioned manner, 'Harry, I will be wholly yours—where thou goest I will go.' And he says she meant it, too. When he came to think of the times he might want to have a little quiet game, or something of that sort, he felt that such devotion as hers might pall on him; and so he let the matter drop."

A LADY, residing in a quiet village in Suffolk, used to take an interest in a very aged couple who were spinning out the last thread of life in "Darby and Joan" fashion, seated on either side of their fireplace. She often paid them a visit to cheer them up. The old man had been ailing, and at last a day came when the visitor found only one chair occupied. Darby was not in his usual place. "Where is your husband?" "Well, mum! he be gone at last." "Oh! I'm sorry, that is very sad for you," said the lady, seeking to find some words of consolation. "Ye, mum, it be sad," replied the old woman; "but then, you see, he were fearfully ill in the way of the oven."

THE following scene really took place in a small town in the north of England: Two foreigners, evidently from sunny Spain, were observed, in one of the streets, gazing around in evident distress of mind. Suddenly one of them noticed a policeman, and, darting forward, seized that personage by his coat button, shrieking, "How much time? How much time?" As the poor policeman thought that perhaps they wished to go to some place of entertainment, or something of that sort, and wished to know how much time they had to spare, all he could do was to shake his head. Just when the policeman was on the point of despair, a gentleman came up who understood Spanish, and explained to that insulted dignitary that they were quite safe, and only wanted to know the hour, having been told that "if you want to know the time you must ask a policeman."

SOCIETY.

ONE of the Roman reviews promises its readers a series of popular stories by Queen Margaret of Italy.

THE German Emperor, immediately after his accession to the throne, issued strict commands that none of the Court chaplains should preach more than ten-minute sermons.

PRINCE JEAN D'ORLEANS, the younger son of the Duc de Chartres, who has been staying in Denmark for some time with his sister, Princess Waldemar, intends to pass the winter at Copen-hagen.

THE Duke and Duchess of Portland are both great favourites with the Queen, and Princess Henry of Battenberg has shown a great liking for the Duchess, with whom her Royal Highness holds many views in common about the best training for children.

FROM Paris we learn that the old-fashioned custom of kissing a woman's hand is fashionable again, and seems to find good friends among the *beaux* and the *belles* in the Gay City—in the *salons* as well as in the *boudoirs*.

THERE will be the usual assemblage of the members of the Royal Family in England, for the anniversary of Prince Consort's death, December 14th. The Prince and Princess of Wales go to the Castle on the 13th and return to town after the memorial service the next day.

LADY HENRY SOMERSET, while in America, did some travelling of quite as go-ahead a character as the natives of that Continent could boast of. She was twenty-four days away, and in that time held innumerable congresses, visited the World's Fair, and travelled eight thousand miles.

PRINCESS LOUISE and Lord Lorne have purchased a villa at St. Catherine's on the shore of Loch Fyne. This house, which is known as The Pyne, was built by the late Dr. Paterson. It is a fine structure, and stands in very pretty grounds; the windows and terrace command splendid views of the opposite shore of Loch Fyne, with Inverary Castle and its richly-wooded demesne in the foreground, and the hills behind, with the peaks of Ben Cruachan in the distance.

THE Queen's head gardener at Windsor has just now a magnificent variegated show of chrysanthemums, from the purest white to a lovely deep scarlet; in fact, there are colours of nearly every shade for Her Majesty to look at. The evergreens at Windsor this season also look grand, the most tender species of which in the Royal garden are—*Arbutus*, *Cupressus*, *Daphne*, *Erica*, *Juniperus*, *Laurus*, *Magnolia*, *Phylirea*, *Pinus*, *Quercus*, *Rhamnus*, *Thuja*.

THE Empress of Russia has received some valuable gifts as mementoes of the recent Franco-Russian demonstration of friendship. The French resident at Monaco have sent the Empress a superb silver tray emblazoned with Russian and French flags in enamel, with six silver mugs beautifully chased, on each of which is inscribed the name of a Russian war-ship. The Bessangon watchmakers have presented a gold watch covered with diamonds. The Association des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs have given a splendid album containing a series of drawings in black-and-white and in water-colours.

THE Princess of Wales, although much improved in bodily health by her recent long sojourn abroad, has not yet been able to wholly free herself from periodical fits of depression. The fears with which her return to Sandringham were anticipated have unfortunately been to some extent justified, for the Princess still feels the associations of her Norfolk home in some degree painful to her. It was for this reason that the proposed birthday ball was abandoned, the anniversary being celebrated only by a quiet dinner-party. The same cause renders it unlikely that the Princess will be seen in society until the sad fourteenth of January has once more come and gone.

STATISTICS.

IT takes a gallon of milk to produce a pound of cheese.

THERE are in London at this moment two hundred and forty-four thousand females who are learning music!

IT is said that people eat twenty per cent. more bread when the weather is cold than when it is mild.

BRITISH rule extends over an area of 8,557,658 square miles, or more than one-sixth of the world's land surface.

THE number of slaves exported from Africa during the eighteenth century is calculated at six millions. In 1748, nearly one hundred thousand were shipped from the west coast alone.

GEMS.

ECONOMY is the parent of integrity, of liberty, and of ease, and the beauteous sister of temperance, of cheerfulness, and of health.

HOPE spiritualises the earth. Hope makes it always new; and even in the earth's best and brightest aspect, hope shows it to be only the shadow of an infinite bliss hereafter.

NO process is so fatal as that which would cast all men into one mould. Every human being is intended to have a character of his own, to be what no other is, to do what no other can.

DIFFICULTY is never an end in itself, or to be chosen for its own sake. It may often be a most necessary means to high and valuable ends; and as such should be honoured and accepted; but its destiny is to pass away as soon as its mission is fulfilled.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COFFEE JELLY.—Soak half a box of gelatine, add one quart of clear, strong coffee, one teacupful of granulated sugar, and stir until the gelatine is well dissolved. Strain into a wet mould or shallow tin dishes. If the former, pour sweetened cream around it when served, and if the latter, cut in blocks, pile on a glass dish, and serve with sweetened cream in a pitcher.

ATHOLE CAKES.—Five ounces cornflour, three ounces butter, two eggs, two ounces sugar (fine), one ounce orange peel, half teaspoonful baking powder, half teaspoonful essence of lemon. Put the butter and sugar in a basin and beat to a cream. Beat up the eggs and stir them in. Chop up the peel finely and stir it in, then the flour flavouring, and baking powder. Butter some deep patty pans, fill them three-quarters full, and bake in a moderate oven till ready.

SAND CAKES.—Quarter pound flour, quarter pound cornflour, quarter pound sugar, quarter pound butter, one ounce lemon peel, one small egg. Chop up the peel very finely; put the flour and butter in a basin, and rub the butter well in; add the sugar, the peel, and mix very well; make up into a firm paste, with the egg beaten a little or as much of it as is wanted; knead well and roll out as thin as a shilling, cut with a small lid or cutter, and dust sugar over. Put in a moderate oven to bake a pale yellow colour.

COCOANUT CONES.—Beat the whites of five eggs to a rather stiff froth; then sift in by degrees one pound of powdered sugar; beat these until stiff and dry; then add two large cupfuls of grated cocoanut and a teaspoonful of vanilla. Work together carefully and then mould with the hand. Place on buttered paper a distance of about two inches apart, and bake in a very moderate oven; they may be dusted before baking with powdered sugar. It will take about thirty minutes, and they should be only coloured at the top.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Arctic Ocean has a peculiarly green colour.

THE bamboo sometimes grows two feet in twenty-four hours.

TUNGSTEN is a little white metal almost as heavy as gold.

MANY insects hear and breathe with the same apparatus.

CHAIN and cable suspension bridges existed before the Christian era.

ROMAN schoolboys used a wax tablet and pointed stylus instead of slate and pencil.

LAST year seventeen sunken rocks, hitherto unmarked on the sea-charts, were discovered in various parts of the globe in the most convincing manner possible—by ships running on them.

THE only animal which, whether wild or tame, is invariably the friend of man, is the South American puma. Dogs and cats are mortal enemies of human beings whenever they are allowed to lapse in their natural wild state.

IN one country district of Germany "pay weddings" were in vogue until recently, each guest paying for his entertainment as much as he would at an inn, and the receipts being placed aside to set up the happy pair in their new home.

A SCIENTIST states that a nerve remains alive for hours after death. This is demonstrated by attaching, say, the Achilles tendon of a recently-killed rabbit to the myophone and then exciting the sciatic nerve by means of an intermittent current. Such a test shows that the nerve can and does act upon the muscles.

A MOST ingenious system is employed by which the director of the Suez Canal can tell at a glance the exact position of all vessels passing through it. A model is placed in the office at Port Said, and the whole canal is worked from headquarters by means of the telegraph, the position of each ship being marked by a figure on the model. It is thus made easy to arrange for vessels passing each other.

THE United States national salute is one gun for each State; the salute for the President, twenty-one guns; for the Vice-President, seventeen; and for cabinet officers and governors and such lesser officials, fifteen guns. The original salute for the President was as many guns as there were States, but in 1819, when there were twenty-one, it was decided that this number should become permanent as the Presidential salute.

IT is difficult to say what constitutes beauty in women. The Sandwich Islanders estimate women by their weight. The Chinese require them to have deformed feet and black teeth. A girl must be tattooed sky-blue and wear a nose ring to satisfy a South Sea Islander. African princes require their brides to have their teeth filed like those of a saw; and thus goes the world, the criterion of beauty differing according to latitude and longitude.

IN the land of the Moslem, the country of the followers of Mohammed, a Moslem grave, when once filled in, is never to be re-opened on any account. With a view to remove the faintest chance of any grave being thus defiled the Moslem plant a cypress tree on every grave immediately after the interment, which makes the Moslem cemeteries resemble forests. Two hundred millions, or 14 per cent. of the human race, profess Mohammedanism.

PROFESSOR KAUFFMAN has presented to the Egyptian department of the Royal Museum at Berlin a beautiful portrait of the daughter of Herod, who died at the age of thirty-five. He found it at Havara, together with the mummy of the young woman. It is painted on linen, full-faced, with a grey background. The black curly hair is parted in the middle, the eyes are brown and large, there are strings of pearls in the ears, and golden hoops around the throat. It is a portrait that testifies to the art of the age—it being wonderfully executed. The name of the original was Aline.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. S. S.—Depends upon the rules.

ONE IN DOUBT.—It is a question for a solicitor.

A. B.—Much too intricate to be dealt with here.

WORRIED ONE.—No, there is nothing that will remove it.

JANIE.—We can only advise you to apply to a skin hospital.

GORDON B.—Fourpenny pieces are no longer issued from the Mint.

DISTRESSED MOTHER.—The case will have to be decided by a medical man.

CONSTANT READER.—At any good artists' colourman. We never give addresses.

ROB.—Inquire at the Inland Revenue Office, Somerset House.

MAY.—Never heard of it till now; could not therefore recommend it.

SEPTIMUS.—We know of no book devoted to the purpose.

LITTLE IGNORANCE.—Jersey is much nearer to the French than to the English coast.

HAL.—Write to Chelsea and they will tell you what you want to know.

ROBY O'MORE.—Civil engineering is designing of docks, laying out railways, &c.

LYDIA.—For treatment in such a case you must apply to a doctor.

L. Y.—All appliances used for weighing in or out must be tested and certified.

RALPH.—You cannot legally marry again until you have proof of her death.

MRS. PEN.—Bolt clothsprings in clean water once a month, and they will be much more durable.

SAUCY MAG.—Observance of Halloween began in the early part of the seventh century.

PAUL PRY.—It was common in Continental countries before it crept into use in England.

POOR BELLA.—The odour may be removed by rubbing the hands with celery or mustard.

CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER.—We have no experience of such offices, therefore decline to recommend any.

INQUISITIVE.—The white of the eye is known scientifically as the "sclerotic coat."

ARCHIBALD.—We do not know. Probably the stationmaster could inform you.

MARIA ANN.—A "tiff" with her mistress is not sufficient excuse for breach of her engagement.

DICK.—Any communication in the nature of a letter involves the payment of letter rate of postage.

SIR.—We cannot undertake to give an opinion as to the position or stability of any particular society.

B. E. G.—Stourbridge in Worcestershire, is pronounced as if spelt Store-bridge, or sometimes Stowbridge.

IGNORAMUS.—Hypnotism is from the Greek *hypnos*, sleep, meaning a process by which sleep is produced artificially.

ANXIOUS READER.—If the wife takes the late husband's property she is to that extent liable for his debts.

JAMES.—It is not legal for an unlicensed layman to read all the service at public worship in the Church of England.

SIRVLEA.—If you have paid for it out of your own earnings and have come of age it belongs to you, and not to your parents.

STEPHANIE.—You cannot learn step-dances from a book. You must have practical instruction and example from a master of the art.

R. L.—Candidates must be fourteen years old; examination is formal, in easy subjects, writing, reading, arithmetic.

P. S.—The three "professions" are law, physic, and divinity; but almost everybody now speaks of his occupation as a "profession."

H. RADCLIFF.—No person can call himself a chemist or druggist unless he has passed the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society.

AN OLD READER.—Open canned fruit an hour or two before it is needed for use. It is far richer when the oxygen is thus restored to it.

REGINALD DE VERE.—An examination must be passed before the Civil Service Commissioners, from whom information can be obtained.

L. S.—A glass of water containing a squeeze of lemon juice is a wholesome thing to drink the first thing in the morning.

RHEA.—The simplest form of congratulation is best for the purpose stated. Such as: "You have my best wishes for your continued happiness."

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The decani side of the choir of a cathedral is the side on which the Dean would sit—that is, the south side. The cantori side is the north.

EUSTACE.—*Eus* is a Greek word, meaning "all." As a prefix, it denotes that all of the class indicated by the word that follows are represented.

MARLINE.—You must take the coat to a waterproofer, who will cement a new piece of cloth with button holes; the torn ones cannot be mended.

EVARD.—It is impossible for a man to be up in every subject, and most wisely confine themselves to one or two—say history, geography, literature or philosophy.

ISIDORE.—The nearest male relative can take out letters of administration. The property belongs one-third to the second wife and the rest to the children of both marriages equally.

INQUIRER.—Mr. Gladstone first sat in Parliament as member for Newark December 13, 1832-46. Since then for Oxford, for South Lancashire, for Greenwich, and for Midlothian.

PIERRE.—They are spoken of as "the descendants of a vast number of Hindoos, of the primitive tribes of Hindostan, who were expelled or migrated from that country early in the fourteenth century."

WILL.—A "miner" was at one time applied only to a worker in a metalliferous mine, but it is now common both to metal or ironstone miners, and to colliers. The latter would be more correctly called coal-miners.

Q. T.—The profession is a desirable one to follow, if, as you say, you have a taste for it. It is a calling which, while it enables you to enlighten others, adds to your own fund of knowledge.

E. T.—Take out a post office order for the amount and send it on, just as you would do if you were sending from one part of the United Kingdom to another.

POOR BEELZEBUB!

SIR RANDAL had a scolding wife,

A regular Xantippe,

Who led him such an awful life,

No wonder he was happy,

But as he did not wish to be

The butt of all the city,

He hid his feelings skilfully

In this dissembling ditty :

"Oh, what wretched man without a wife ?

Mine is the blessing of my life !"

Beelzebub was passing near,

O'erheard his fond laudation,

Quoth he, "A wife so sweet and dear,

Would be a consolation !"

And so he stole Sir Randal's wife

By temptings sharp and shady,

At Mother Eve he did deceive,

For he deceived my Lady !

For women still (ay, there's the rub !)

Will listen to Beelzebub.

When she was gone, of course, you know,

It made a dreadful scandal ;

The neighbours said, "We told you so !"

And pitied "poor Sir Randal !"

Sir Randal only winked his eye

(Appropriate solution !)

"My friends," quoth he, "I shall not try

The courts for 'restitution,'"

For though I have to cook and scrub,

I pity poor Beelzebub !"

F. E. W.

M. H.—Either the consent of the medical attendant must be got to the release of the man, or an application must be addressed to the Home Secretary for authority to have the man examined by outside physicians.

NAN.—They are sometimes fried in butter, salt, cayenne, and finely powdered sugar being sprinkled over them. To clean turn inside out. Wash well with salt and water, using several changes of water.

ONE WHO WISHES TO KNOW.—Peers and baronets, officers of the army and navy, and medical professors are the persons who are supposed to have a legal right to place cockades on the hats of their flunkies, but as a matter of fact there is no law on the subject.

ELEANOR.—There are two ways of meanding such a coat. One by rubbing beeswax on the wrong side of the seams. Another and better plan is to go over the worn parts lightly with Nubian blacking. This will renew the appearance and waterproof at the same time.

F. MORTIMER.—Letters and telegrams may be addressed to the head Post Office to be called for, but they must be addressed to the real names of the persons. Letters addressed to initials or fictitious names are not now received.

BUSY BETH.—Mix blacklead with sweet oil instead of water, give the grates a free coat of that, but do not "brush it up;" that will prevent rust; except in a very bad case a thorough polishing with blacklead in ordinary way is sufficient protection against rust.

B. T.—If your mother dies leaving no will the whole of her property reverts to her husband. It is always advisable to consult a respectable solicitor in drawing up a will so as to ensure it being legally correct. Clean water we should think.

FERNANDO.—The term "yacht" is derived from the Danish word *jacht*, meaning a chase; hence yachting is the chasing of one vessel after another, and accordingly, yachting and yacht racing are synonymous expressions. A yacht is, and always has been, essentially a pleasure craft.

FAIR.—Canada offers the inducement of a cheap bit of land to one in your circumstances, it is also a wider field than New Zealand, and more easily reached; for these reasons, as also for the additional one that in spring agricultural labourers are usually in fair demand there, you should select Canada.

IGNORANT ONE.—A man may legally make his own will. It need not be stamped. It must be signed by the testator in the presence of two witnesses, who must also sign in his presence, and in the presence of each other. The witnesses should not be interested in the will or they will lose their legacies.

BRUCE G.—It is obtained by having two bags or holders containing oxygen and hydrogen gases, which are passed together through a tube and set fire to, the flame being made to play on a ball of lime; apparatus is necessary, and it is quite possible to have a bit of an explosion when the arrangement is badly managed.

ROBERT.—You can only learn the business in question by going into an office where it is conducted. As there is no royal road to learning, so there is no way of acquiring a practical knowledge of business without familiarising the mind with the details which are inseparable from it.

ADMIRER OF THE "LONDON READER".—Your best plan would be to insert a short advertisement in some paper stating the kind of stamps you possess, the number of them, and asking offers from intending purchasers. There are parties in London who buy, but they do so in order to sell again at a profit, consequently they offer very little for them themselves.

HARRY'S SWEETHEART.—Gloves are cleaned in naphtha. It is well to put them into a quart fruit jar about half full of the fluid. Screw down the cover and give them a thorough shaking. Take them out, spread on an old towel, and with a dry corner of it rub any spots that may remain. If they are very much soiled, they may require a second shaking-up. Then hang them up in the air for at least twelve hours.

ROSALIE.—To soften whalebone and render it fit for cutting up, it is boiled in water for several hours, and while hot it is cut in lengths, and if for brushes it is cut with a compound guarded knife for the purpose. As it is bone, the substitute for teeth in the Greenland and black southern whale no doubt it could be melted to a jelly, first by steeping in water for two or three days, and then boiled in a close copper till dissolved.

LAURA T.—A lady help is one who meets your description, but without the means to maintain an establishment of her own; she therefore asserts or acts up to her social position in the establishment of another, who shares her income with her in return for being relieved of a large part of duties which income lays on her; she is not a servant, because she is acknowledged to be of equal rank (though of lesser authority) with the lady of the house.

ELLA.—Take about one pound of tomatoes, remove the stalks, wipe them in a clean damp cloth, and fry them in some sweet beef dripping; cover with a plate, and leave to cool while you grill slices of thinly cut and trimmed ham. Take up the tomatoes, arrange them on a dish of buttered toast, and lay the rolls of ham between. Keep them hot while you poach half a dozen fresh eggs, and place these round the tomatoes, on which they should rest slightly. Decorate the dish with little tufts of parsley set here and there.

NESTA.—Half a cupful of bread crumbs, just milk enough to swell them, two eggs, two tablespoonsfuls of butter, three of sugar, the juice of one lemon, and grated rind of two. Beat sugar and butter to a cream, then the eggs and lemon juice, and lastly the bread and milk. Mix and bake in one crust, with two long strips an inch wide laid lightly around the edge so as to make it twice as thick as the bottom. Gently press the lower edge of this strip to make it adhere and pour in the mixture. Bake in a hot oven twenty minutes.

AMANDA.—Take the bird out and wash the cage thoroughly with scalding water, special attention being given to the ends of the spars, all corners and crevices; the object is to destroy not only any lurking insects, but their eggs as well; dry the cage before a hot fire, taking care that the wood does not actually char; next paint all joints and crevices with a little fir-tree oil; dust the bird well with pyrethrum powder, or Keating's insect destroyer; put a white handkerchief over cage and see if there are any insects on it in morning; if so, repeat operations; examination must extend over a week at any rate.

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